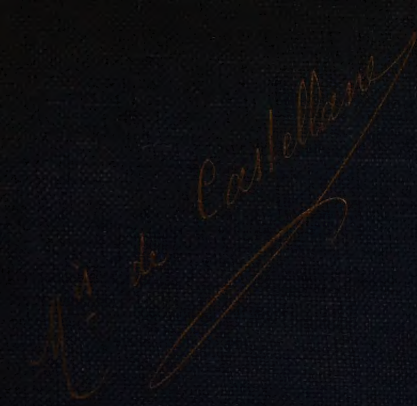

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MEN AND THINGS OF MY TIME

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MEN AND THINGS OF MY TIME

BY

THE MARQUIS DE CASTELLANE

TRANSLATED BY

ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

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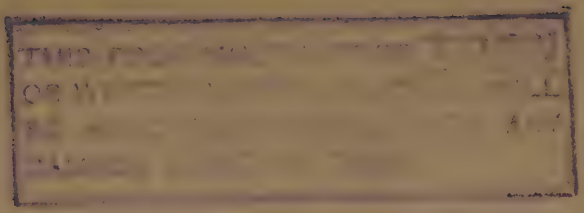

MEN AND THINGS OF MY TIME

CHAPTER I

HOW WE WERE BROUGHT UP FIFTY YEARS AGO

1

My boyhood, like that of almost every Frenchman of the time, was spent in the simplest fashion possible. Nor should I have the presumption to tell the story to a public which I could hardly expect to take any interest in it but for the certainty that this story must needs throw a great light upon the dizzy leap into the unknown that has since been taken by society gone mad. Any one awaking to-day from a fifty years' continuous sleep—a father, a landlord, a public man, a man imbued with notions of tradition and religion—would open his wondering eyes in vain. He would under-

stand nothing of the prodigious disturbance of things that has occurred around his home during that space of time—above, below, in the whole domain of mankind. It is certain that the nineteenth century, which was pre-eminently the century of physical speed, was also pre-eminently that of moral, or, if we prefer, of un-moral, speed. Between Napoleon III. and M. Fallières, France has aged more than she did between Hugh Capet and Louis XVI. I invite the reader to the spectacle of this ageing at full tilt. By contemplating what we were then, what our fathers were and our mothers and our educators, their principles and the rights which they wielded over us, he will be better able to understand what he himself has ceased to be.

2

It was in the month of October, 1852; I had just turned seven years of age. One fine morning, my mother said to me:

"My child, the time has come to begin your education."

"What education?"

"Pluck up your courage. Henceforth we shall live apart; but I shall be near you, for

all that. We leave to-morrow morning for Orleans."

She explained to me that it did not look well for a boy to be brought up by a widow; that, moreover, even if she would like to bring him up, she could not. And she drew for me this picture of the life which I was to lead from that time onward:

"I am sending you to one of those establishments for classical education of which the doors have lately been opened to Christian parents, thanks to the welcome law introduced by my great friend, your guardian, M. de Falloux. I am placing you under the care of the greatest bishop of modern times, one of whom I can safely say that his like has not been seen since the days of Bossuet. Mgr. Dupanloup will teach you religion, honour and polite literature: all, in short, that goes to make a gentleman. You will live three miles out of Orleans, at the Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin, in the good open air, while I, your mother, will settle in the town of Orleans and from there watch over your health and your education. Come, my boy, take courage!"

She kissed me . . . and disappeared.

I was left dumbfoundered. A regular tempest

rose up in my heart and soon degenerated into an outburst. I flung myself madly into the arms of Philippine, the nurse who had brought me up, and I sobbed through the night. Why was I being parted from all that I held dear? Why must I be sent away? Why abandoned? . . . Why? Why?

And, already hating it, I attacked the harshness of the uncouth highlander, the breaker of souls, that M. Dupanloup all his life remained.

The next morning, we set out for Orleans; and, in order, no doubt, to familiarize me the sooner with the surroundings in which my youth was to be spent, my mother decided to take me straight from the station to the college, without first taking possession of the modest little detached house which she was thenceforth to occupy in the grounds of the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

The day was drawing to its close when our cab pulled up at the gate of the little seminary of the Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin. We were expected. An old priest came out to greet us. He stroked my head; he said:

"The dear little fellow!"

A nun—I forget of which order—came to the rescue. I was handed over to her charge, on the

pretence of making sure that I had brought the regulation outfit. When the process of verification was finished, I asked:

"Where is mamma?"

"Dear child," she replied, "your mamma is gone. She will come to see you to-morrow!"

I will not attempt to describe my fury. I felt as if I had been robbed by highwaymen. They had taken my mother from me!

It was then that from the hands of women I passed into what is called the hands of men. In those days, moral anodynes were not yet known.

Supper-time had come. I was taken to an enormous refectory. A stale smell of burnt fat clung to the walls. At an endless table sat a long array of children. I was the youngest and the smallest. We were each given a diminutive slice of beef, a portion of beans, a chunk of bread, some nuts . . . and that was all.

From the age of seven, at which I then was, until that of eighteen, which I reached on leaving the college, but for the fact that the beef alternated with veal and the beans with potatoes, I knew no other bill of fare than this, as regards either quality or quantity, at the two meals served at mid-day and eight o'clock daily. To be perfectly truthful, I must mention

a glass of *abondance*, or very weak wine and water, which was doled out to us with extreme care morning and evening. Yet this frugal diet, with which no boarder would be satisfied nowadays, procured me the finest health in the world!

At nine o'clock, we were all between the sheets. Under the influence of weariness and excitement, I fell like a log on the bed prepared for me in a large dormitory containing over fifty. But, the next morning, when, at five o'clock, the persistent strokes of the great bell of the college began to give the signal for awaking, I lay stiff, lifeless, numbed in every limb. Gradually, however, I became used to these early hours. Throughout my youth, I endured them, not without regret, but without slackness, and thus acquired the habit of manly effort instead of giving way to the promptings of the more or less indolent nature which we all possess within us.

Of our toilet I will give but a few summary particulars: it was itself so summary in the course of that educational period! Water? Little, if any! Just a small hand-basin, in which we dipped the end of our towels, and a few old fragments of soap, which we passed lightly over our hands. All this once a day,

while once a month only were we admitted to the very great honour of taking a foot-bath.

In summer, however, things were sometimes different. The Loire did not flow under our windows for nothing. Twice a week, we were allowed to plunge bodily into its health-giving waters ; but these numerous summer baths were hardly sufficient to rid our young skins of their many months' accumulation of dirt, especially when a prolonged winter had reduced our opportunities of cleaning ourselves by changing our ordinary wash-hand-basins into bowls full of ice.

Without pretending that a state of filth is more suited to the satisfactory development of children than a state of cleanliness, I cannot help remarking that, dirty young pigs though we were, it was just we who, a few years later, in 1871, gave proofs of endurance and vigour worthy of the heroic age. The air we breathed was, it is true, of an exceptional quality. One thing made up for another. In lieu of scented children, we were turned into hardy plants, naturally inhaling the life which as naturally came to them.

The Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin, by one of those topsy-turvy changes so frequent here below, had

been erected quite close to the charming country-house built ninety years earlier by a farmer-general for Mlle. Raucourt. It was here that the famous actress, who was even more celebrated for her excesses than for her talents, had led the gay life, to the great scandal of Orleans society. The little diocesan seminary had been placed back to back, so to speak, with what was once her dwelling, thus allowing the young pupils confined in it to benefit both in health and natural development by the magnificent French garden which, in the old days, had witnessed the actress's frolics and love-affairs. From a beautiful terrace that overhung the Loire we inhaled the salutary emanations of the mighty river twice a day.

This was the setting and this the atmosphere in which the whole of my early childhood was passed. Twice a week, my mother came to spend half an hour with me in the parlour. Each fresh leave-taking was accompanied by fresh tears. Once a month, I went to Orleans to spend the day with her. She bought me a wall-flower for my garden, some chocolate for my lunch. There ended my amusements and my joys.

3

In two years' time, my mother was of opinion that I had sunk with sufficient thoroughness into the physical and intellectual mould of which M. Dupanloup was the inventor. At the end of the summer holidays, she went to Rome. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was to be proclaimed on the 8th of December following: she wished to be present. She left me, at the age of ten, under the direction of the diocesan priests charged with the conduct of the establishment and under the high supervision of two of her intimate friends, the Comte and Comtesse de Rocheplate, who at once became what, in the college phrase, I styled "my friends outside." I was so unaccustomed to useless displays of sentiment that the long separation resulting from my mother's absence appeared to me less cruel than it might have done. I resigned myself pretty easily: not that I was indifferent, but I had an idea that my family were about to play a part in the affairs of the Church; and the pride which I felt at this atoned for the void which distance brought to my heart.

It was then that the first act of emancipation took place in my life, entailing the most grievous

consequences. Pent up though my childhood had been until that time, I had learnt to use my eyes and to see what went on around me. Now, during the last two years, each time that I sallied forth from school and strode along the Orleans streets, I had noticed enormous posters advertizing theatrical performances. The Orleans Theatre! How fine that must be! I used often to question my masters.

"Shame, shame!" they replied. "That building, once a church, turned into a pagan temple!"

I did not insist, but my young brain continued to ponder. Ah, if I were but allowed to go there, to walk in, to hear, were it only for a minute, what was being said, what was being sung! . . . The opera, the opera, above all, wielded an unspeakable spell over my imagination. My mother had once spoken before me of "Les Huguenots." She had extolled its beauty, especially in the fourth act. Oh, the curiosity it aroused in me! Monks blessing daggers! The Château de Chenonceau represented on the stage! I longed to see that at all costs.

One day, the temptation became too strong for me. It was a half-holiday at the college. The first poster that met my eyes as I entered Orleans was that of the municipal theatre. It

advertized a special performance for that same evening; and, as luck would have it, the work to be given was Meyerbeer's masterpiece! My heart stopped beating in my chest. Feverishly I read all the similar notices; they all said the same thing: "Les Huguenots"! That was what they were going to perform. And it was in my own power to be present, if I pleased.

The whole day long, I remained anxious and preoccupied. A terrible battle raged within my little self, between my reluctance to deceive the charming friends to whom my mother had entrusted me and the irresistible attraction of that fascinating title, "Les Huguenots." I came out of it beaten. In the evening, a footman of M. de Rocheplate's took me to the booking-office whence started the omnibus that carried the young pupils back to the Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin. Under cover of the darkness, I slipped away and, running like a madman, made for the theatre. When I walked in, I saw, passing before a mirror in one of the corridors leading to the house, the features of a pale, almost livid child. It was myself passing, but I did not recognize myself.

The reader will not care to hear about the impression which I received in the course of this provincial performance, with an orchestra of two

violins and a piano and with four wretched monks to bless the swords of Nevers and Saint-Brice. The story of the extent to which I enjoyed all this would have no slightest interest for him; but the aftermath is a different matter.

Well then, the performance being over, as it was obviously necessary that I should sleep somewhere, I resolved to go back and knock at the door of the house of "my friends outside." Fortunately, the whole family had not yet gone to bed. The door was opened. I flung myself weeping into M. de Rocheplate's arms. He forgave me, had a bed made up for me and, at daybreak the next morning, his carriage and horses stood waiting before the door, ready to take me—this time direct—to the Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin. As I left, he uttered these simple words:

"Provided, my young friend, that your superior does not find out!"

Unfortunately, he did find out. A fortnight after my escapade, I was sent for, one fine morning, by the principal. He informed me that I was expelled from the establishment. I was to be handed back to my mother, who had returned from Rome and was expecting me in Paris, where I should arrive that same evening. What

was said was done. In Paris there was no one waiting to meet me. I was thanking my stars, when I heard the priest who was with me give an address to the driver of the cab which he had hailed:

"No. 60, Rue Saint-Jacques."

And he explained that that was where he was instructed to take me. Now No. 60, Rue Saint-Jacques, on the pediment of which the words "Brother House" were inscribed in big letters, was nothing but a house of correction for the use of young men of family. I passed a whole week there, locked up in a cell, on dry bread and water. Twice a day, I appeared before the rector, not half a bad man in other respects, who, after duly lecturing me on the virtues of repentance and resignation, rang for a servant, who whipped me conscientiously, in the rector's presence, with a scourge of leather thongs, the time-honoured *martinet*. And all this—all this indignation, all this castigation—for an excessive longing to visit the theatre which I had found myself unable to resist! Was the punishment really in any sort of proportion to the crime? Would any one nowadays dare to treat a poor little youngster so harshly for so slight an offence? *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis.* In the old days, we were brought to our senses with the

whip; to-day, children are tamed by being deprived of their sweets at dessert; yet they will seize the opportunity, just as we did, to hear "Les Huguenots" on the sly, even though it be in a provincial town!

4

As a special favour, I was readmitted to the little seminary of the Chapel. M. Dupanloup sent for me and forgave me. I was to spend eight more years there in the course of my education.

Nobody will be surprised when I say that, of all the subjects which I was taught, that of religion was imparted in the most complete and thorough fashion. The religious instruction which we received was almost exclusively dogmatic and hardly, or not at all, sentimental and, contrary to what might be supposed, was based upon neither pink paper garlands nor lurid pictures of the Sacred Heart. It must be remembered that the Catholics of that time were less disposed than were their children after them to look upon unexplained facts as miraculous emanations of the divine will; and an incident had lately

occurred within the walls of the college which would have put our masters on their guard against any explanation of this kind, even if they had been tempted to force it upon our acceptance.

The Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin had been inhabited by quite a colony of saintly persons before becoming the retreat of Mlle. Raucourt. Built upon the site of the caves in which those saints used to dwell, the village was called after the most famous of their number. Now it so happened that, on a certain day, a supply of sand was needed at the college. There was plenty within easy reach; and a labourer was sent to dig some up. Suddenly, he brought to light a collection of bones. The bones must be those of the saint! Public rumour stated that he was buried there. All the masters were sent for; all went down on their knees before the sacred relics. There was no doubt but that they were really those of St. Mesmin,* or, at any rate, of one of his companions, for the simple reason that they could not possibly be anything else. . . . It was thereupon decided to take us pupils in procession to the caves. One evening, at sunset,

* St. Mesmin, or Maximinus, was the second Abbot of Mici, near Orleans. His feast falls on the 15th of December. —*Translator's Note.*

three hundred youngsters, each carrying a taper, might have been seen piously defiling before those human remains, singing hymns as they went. Not one member of this more or less sacerdotal little world had the very least notion of the science of fossils. We became aware of this fact—too late, alas, to save the reputation of the instruction that had been given us—when, on the following day, a master from the Orleans grammar-school, attracted by the noise created by our precious discovery, declared and undertook to prove that what we had taken for the bones of a man were nothing more nor less than the bones of a dog! This damper administered to our credulity modified both our enthusiasm and that of our masters, who applied themselves, a little sheepishly, to the task of sinking it in a wise oblivion.

5

Of the literary instruction which we received I can say but one thing: it never ceased to be most purely classical. It was exempt from any kind of fancy: Homer, Virgil, Cicero, Tacitus, Boileau, La Fontaine, Fénelon, Racine and Molière reigned as masters and as exclusive masters. I can hardly remember, on leaving the

class of rhetoric, being initiated into a few hackneyed pages of Chateaubriand, or even of Lacordaire. Those two great men of letters had not, in the eyes of our professors, a sufficiently respectful cult of traditional forms. We were not allowed to become romanticists. I do not pretend that this severe method was likely to produce men of genius; but what has the opposite method given us? A generation of literary men obscure in style, weak in phrasing, incapable of rounding off a sentence. Are these any better than the others? We were conservatives; they are innovators. The language which they write is hardly ever to be understood at the first reading. Therefore it is not a language which is entitled to call itself French. It is anything you please, but not that.

In his love for the ancients and, no doubt, in the hope of giving us a taste for their company, M. Dupanloup resolved to strike a resounding blow. He therefore hit upon the idea of making the pupils of the Chapel perform a tragedy of Sophocles in the original Greek. The play was to be given at Orleans, in the great consistorial hall of the bishop's palace. The bishop's choice turned first upon "Philoctetes" and next upon "Œdipus Coloneus." For more than a month

on end, we did nothing but adapt and translate. We wrote, talked and sang nothing but Greek. Zeus, what a beautiful language! But also what gibberish! Again, for a month, it was nothing but sewing-bees and singing-lessons. The sisters in charge of the linen-room spent their days in cutting and snipping calico, suddenly revealing that vocation as a dressmaker which every woman born into this world carries within herself; and a priest who was not quite so bad a musician as the rest initiated us into the mysteries of the fine score written, if I be not mistaken, by Mendelssohn for the character, unknown to our playwrights, called Chorus.

The great day came. All the Hellenists of France were present: Burnouf, Patin, Villemain and others less famous at Athens, but more decorative in Paris, such as Falloux and Berryer. Of course, we were detestable. I myself filled the part of Antigone and displayed a sentimentalism which became ridiculous by dint of exaggeration. On the other hand, I had the consolation of hearing one of the illustrious scholars remark out loud, pointing to me:

"I say, that little fair-haired fellow is rather nice!"

At the end of the performance, I saw them

all congratulate one another. The humbugs! They were pretending that they had understood a language of which, like good polyglots, they were almost as ignorant as ourselves; but the trick was done. Greek had been glorified in the presence of all that was eminent in the world of letters. Henceforth, everything at the college would be done for love of Greek.

My literary education was continued in this atmosphere laden with florid narrative and Latin verses. At the age of seventeen, steeped through and through in its effluvia, I entered the class of rhetoric. Here a surprise awaited me. Starting with that year, M. Dupanloup wished to have the art of speaking really taught in the class. With this object in view, he instituted a course of eloquence. Once a week, he came to give it himself. He taught us all that constitutes this most delicate, this most beautiful of the arts, from moderation of gesture to the proper use of the voice; and each time, also, he had the patience to listen, if not to the sermons, at least to the homilies which we had prepared and which we were allowed to deliver before him. In a word, we learned to preach.

My turn came. Thanks to intuition or to my native diffidence, I had taken as the text of my

discourse the words, "*Virgo fidelis:* faithful Virgin." For ten minutes, I said such beautiful things on the subject of fidelity and uttered them with such enthusiasm that the whole class burst into applause. That day, by way of rewarding me, M. Dupanloup invited me to his table, where I was admitted to the honour of toying with a few choice prunes in his company. Judging by the success that attended my speech, I was entitled to believe and, in fact, I still believe that I should have made an excellent preacher. My fate, however, willed things otherwise.

The reader has, no doubt, asked himself what place was allotted to accomplishments in an educational scheme of this character. Of course, they had no place at all. Drawing, music, modern languages were looked upon as intruders. The door was opened to them only on payment of a large ransom; and for this reason the great majority of the pupils were but very seldom brought into contact with them. Accomplishments, indeed! Mere waste of time! Our instructors forgot that to people one's surroundings and one's self with sensations which, though fleeting, are not provoked by necessity constitutes one of the most assured sources of happiness.

MGR. DUPANLOUP, BISHOP OF ORLEANS.

In short, I emerged from my college course without knowing one word of English or German, incapable of making a simple diagram, able at most to move my fingers stiffly and awkwardly over the keyboard of a piano, although this procured me the signal honour of being appointed to play the organ in chapel on days of religious ceremonies. It was little, no doubt, and yet it was something. I suspect more than one of my schoolfellows of being jealous of my exceptional privileges, saying to themselves that, more favoured by fortune than they, I owed it only to the means which my parents had at their command and which theirs did not possess.

This uninteresting kind of training made men, but men of wood, dry and utterly boring. Fancy, mad though it be, has at least this advantage, that it diverts those who behold it; and, though diverting one's self is not everything in life, it is something, for all that.

6

This premeditated and deliberate method of education was that of our masters. Was it also that of our relatives, or did we find, when we went home, the affectionate absence of constraint

to which we bade good-bye at school? Each year, at Christmas-time and during the summer holidays, I returned to the maternal roof. Certainly, I there found the caresses which I missed at the Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin, but I also perceived the same rigour of conduct and language which had not for one moment ceased to reign there during those twelve years of cloistered existence. In Paris, where we went as seldom as possible, they would not for worlds have taken me to a theatre; all they did was to send me to call on M. and Mme. d'Aubusson, my grandparents, who, although both over seventy years of age, still kept up the sweet and gentle habit of sleeping in the same bed. Thus ensconced, they received their grandson, to the great annoyance of my mother, to whom I told the story when I came home.

Then what did they do with me all day long? A tutor, or rather a sort of day-companion, gave me a few pages of Lamartine or Hugo to read on the sly, as a special favour, he said, with injunctions not to tell a soul! The tutor's son was asked to stay to lunch and afterwards remained and played ball with me or draughts, according to the state of the weather. The Loire flowed within half a mile of the house; and,

as I was gradually acquiring a taste for cleanliness, we often went down to bathe. Sometimes, but seldom, I rode an old horse called "The Family Safeguard"; and that was all.

At the age of eighteen, when I left school for good, I had taken my bachelor's degree; I could translate Horace and Virgil at sight; I had a few vague notions of Greek, which I respected more than I understood it, because of its credit and its good position in society; I was fond of spinning a row of words together; I philosophized after the manner of Malebranche; and I was competent to play the organ at high mass in the village. On the other hand, I knew none of the great writers who had given lustre to other countries than my own; in the domain of literature I was the merest provincial; I was incapable of translating two lines of a modern foreign language, of riding a spirited horse, of handling a sword; in short, I realized all the conditions of learning and environment that were required to make me a perfect little booby. Two facts alone had claims upon my gratitude and satisfaction: the hard and eminently sober life forced upon me for twelve years in the prison which I was now leaving had endowed me with a constitution of iron; and I had been long

acquainted with annoyance. Capable of enduring things, by the same token and for the same reasons I should now be capable of enduring men, who are very nearly as unpleasant to deal with. Good health and a capacity for being bored with a good grace were the two most appreciable results of the education bestowed upon young Frenchmen of a certain class fifty years ago. Certainly, it did not make eagles of them; but neither did it turn them into chicken-hearted poltroons. It was these Frenchmen, remember, who saved the honour of the flag in 1871. To forget that, even for a moment, would be an act of grave injustice.

CHAPTER II

MY MOTHER'S SALON

(1865-1878)

1

In 1865, after eighteen years spent in the country, the Marquise de Castellane, my mother, decided to return to Paris. She came back surrounded with the double halo of her birth and virtues. She was the grand-niece of Talleyrand, brought up under his eyes and by his care, and everybody in the world of politics and religion knew that the famous statesman owed it to her and to her alone that before his death he returned to the pale of the Church. In vain a few people spread the report that his conversion was the personal work of the Abbé Dupanloup: nobody was taken in by this insinuation and no one had the smallest doubt but that the unaided prayer of a child had obtained a retractation which any priest, however eloquent, would have been powerless to produce. M. de Talleyrand had

been reconciled by the voice of a girl; he would not have been by mere argument; so that we may say that it was charm rather than faith that made him pass from this world to the next leaning on the arm of religion. Since this action, which was, in the full and original sense of the word, a political action and which at once classed the woman who performed it among the active soldiers in the army of Christ, my mother had retired into voluntary exile, seeking in solitude a balm to heal wounds the severest of which had made her a widow at the age of twenty-six. She now returned to Paris, where my establishment demanded her care.

It was at the time when Napoleon III., by forcing upon the Papal States the system that was eventually to give rise to Italian unity, had roused the hatred alike of the Catholics, hurt in their independence, and of the French, offended in their common sense. Both of these happened to have as their leaders men who were numbered among my mother's oldest friends. These were M. Thiers, who had received his first encouragement and assistance from M. de Talleyrand at a time when the future President of the French Republic was still only a struggling journalist—generally referred to by the disrespectful nick-

name of "Foutriquet"—and M. de Falloux, who, since the publication of the "Syllabus," was recognized beyond dispute as the leader of enlightened (since described as liberal) Catholicism.

These malcontents—I will not say these conspirators—required a place in which they could vent their spleen. My mother arrived in the nick of time and provided them with one. She settled in the Rue de Grenelle, in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and in one of its oldest houses; and it seemed as though she had gone there for the express purpose of permitting two political and social groups, hitherto mutually hostile, to become reconciled, with a view to taking common action against the common foe, the Empire! She had made no calculations in selecting her new residence. Chance alone had guided her choice, but chance is often very foreseeing; it knows what it is doing and whither it is leading us, without appearing to. Here, in fact, was the centre of the two great oppositions, the constitutional and the religious, which, some years later, would be called upon to take up the heavy succession of the discredited Empire. Legitimists and clericals instinctively fixed their abode in this part of Paris, as though drawn together by secret affinities. My mother, by

settling in their midst and nightly throwing open the doors of her drawing-room in this quarter, merely hastened the movement of reconciliation which had for some time been taking shape unknown to themselves.

The first condition for the formation of a *salon* is that it should be easy of access. An old academician and a young royalist alike must be able to make their way to it without getting splashed with mud or being obliged to take expensive cabs. History teaches us that the *salons* of both Mme. de Sévigné and Mme. Geoffrin were situated in the very centre of the districts inhabited by the *précieuses* and the men of letters. And one of my most vivid memories is the long row of clogs which I saw standing every evening in the hall outside my mother's drawing-room. Those clogs were a tangible proof that the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle bore one of the first conditions of success within itself. It contained another which was of even better omen: the condition of permanency. It has been said that a door must be open or shut: the door of a *salon*, where people go with the object of talking and of making others talk, should never be closed. Its frequenters must be sure of finding an audience with whom to

discuss the least bit of news. My mother's delicate health, which forbade any attempt at going out at night, insured this essential of success. Add to these two factors that of a table whose reputation dated back to Louis Esbras, M. de Talleyrand's famous *chef*, and you will understand that circumstances lent themselves admirably to the constitution of what is known as a *salon*. As a matter of fact, all that Paris at that time contained in the way of discontented politicians and doubting Catholics were at once seen to flock to it. We shall witness the long procession, turn by turn, of the Thiers, the Falloux, the Cochins, the Gratrys, the Dupanloups, of all those who were watching for the downfall of the Empire and only waiting for the final blunder which it would not be slow in committing.

2

M. Thiers was at that period the spoilt darling of all thinking and reasoning Paris. It was the time when he had just opened his prophetic horizons upon the foreign policy of the Second Empire. It was as though he had made France take a bath of common-sense. Everybody was rallying round him, even in-

cluding—and above all including—the uncompromising legitimists, who felt the government crisis coming and who understood that, to turn it to their own advantage, they would have to reckon with the immense popularity which King Louis-Philippe's late minister was on the high-road to acquiring. Among them was one, the Marquis de la Ferté, who wished for this reconciliation, if possible, more than any of the others. Himself the son-in-law of M. Molé, the famous inventor of the coalition of the two hostile branches of the House of France, he was a coalitionist by destiny. He was also one by conviction, so much so that M. le Comte de Chambord had appointed him the representative of his kingship *in partibus*. The friendly relations of the Castellanes and the Molés had long ago produced an agreeable intimacy between Mlle. Molé and my mother. On her return to Paris, the first person whom the Marquise de Castellane saw crossing her door was the daughter of the former minister of the government of July. The Marquis de la Ferté, therefore, found himself quite naturally transferred to the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle; and it also happened quite naturally that he met M. Thiers there, a statesman with whom, if I remember rightly, he had until then had no relations.

M. Thiers owed much to M. de Talleyrand, who had guided his first steps in the field of politics, although this did not prevent the younger man from treating his patron very badly in his "Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire." Prompted either by regret for his ingratitude or, more likely, by a far-seeing ambition, M. Thiers was one of the first to call on my mother. He would come several times a week to knock at the door of his late benefactor's niece; and while Mme. Thiers, with a magnificent pearl necklace on her bare shoulders, went and buried herself in an easy-chair, where she regularly fell asleep, he began to lay his indictment against the Empire with the inexorable glow of his wonderful wit. Thus brought face to face, the two men, far from ignoring each other, appeared to have come to so immediate an agreement that none who heard them had any doubt but that the one had suddenly become a royalist heart and soul, while the other, touched by constitutional grace, had never served but one flag—the Tricolour. It was in the course of one of these conversations, or rather speeches (for M. Thiers never talked: he always held forth), that he hit upon his famous formula of "the United Monarchy."

"It was I who invented the phrase," he was to

say, five years later, when the National Assembly found itself grappling with the thousand and one intrigues woven by his efforts.

And it was, in fact, he who invented it then, in anticipation of the approaching substitution for the Empire of a republic in which he did not yet dream of filling the office of president and in the duration of which he had no belief. The phrase was soon hawked about from *salon* to *salon*. Those who heard it uttered—the Trochus, the Vitets, the Carnés, the Xavier Marmiers—discussed it, approved of it and finally spread it all over Paris. In the opinion of everybody and, I believe, in his own opinion too, M. Thiers, the erstwhile demagogue, who, in 1832, had presided over the sack of the archbishop's palace; the erstwhile instrument of the disgrace of the Duchesse de Berry, the mother of the rightful king: M. Thiers had rallied, beyond a doubt, to the royalist cause, quite simply, without restriction or discussion of any kind. From that moment, my mother's drawing-room was stamped as a political *salon*. And, in point of fact, during the six years that still separated us from the fall of the imperial dynasty, we saw passing through it all political and thinking Paris, from M. Falloux, a royalist in any and every case, down to

M. Wilson, then quite a young deputy, who seemed to be intended for a very different destiny from that to which he abandoned himself since. Every evening, voices less well-known, but of no less authority, took up the eminent statesman's theme. Amenity was now the order of the day in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. There was no more bitterness, no more violence; peace among royalists; and in royalism unification. It was then that I witnessed an incident that reveals the passion with which public affairs were treated at the time and the conceited ardour of those who were expecting before long to be called to the head of affairs.

There was a dinner-party that evening in the Rue de Grenelle, the guests including M. Thiers, General Trochu, M. Vitet, M. Wilson, M. Cochery and a few others. The subject of conversation throughout dinner was the condition of the French forces. General Trochu, who had just published a severe criticism of the army, maintained that its strength was absolutely insufficient to enable it to cope with any of the great European powers. M. Thiers spoke in favour of limited armies, declaring that it was not enough to possess big armies, but that one must have a man capable of handling them:

"Now whom have you?" he exclaimed, mischievously, turning to the first speaker.

At these words, General Trochu could restrain himself no longer: he rose and, standing on his legs, intoned (I can find no other word for it) a regular treatise on strategy, whereupon M. Thiers also sprang to his feet and tried to improve upon it by delivering a treatise of his own, until my mother, caught between these two indefatigable chatterers and not knowing which of them to listen to, adopted the only possible course to separate them. To the great delight of the other guests, who—*risum teneatis, amici!*—were holding their sides with laughter, she gave the signal to rise from table and thus closed the discussion.

The *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle wore its twofold complexion of dynastic opposition and royalist union until the war of 1870. The events which then took place—the proclamation of the Republic on the 4th of September, the advent to power of new men, whom many looked upon as demagogues—did not change this complexion at first. M. Thiers hesitated before unmasking his batteries. He waited until he had become indispensable. In this interlude between his two tendencies, the

royalist and the republican, he assumed a sphinx-like guise, under which the craftiest did not succeed in discovering the real man. I find a proof of this in a visit which he paid my mother at her country-house of Rochecotte, while he was living at Tours. He was accompanied by his wife and his sister-in-law—"his two dear creatures," as he called them—who were themselves supported by Gustave Janicot, editor of the *Gazette de France*, the declared royalist and coalitionist organ. That morning, M. Thiers showed himself but little of a republican. He spoke of Gambetta as "a lunatic" who personified the policy of war to the death (this, by the way, was another phrase which he had just coined). It is true that he, who represented the opposite policy, had been cheered at all the railway-stations along the line by people whom he did not know to be friends of ours and whom I had carefully posted there in order to give him an ovation of a monarchical colour. On the other hand, he was witty and genial and charming, as always.

My mother, who loved her friends in a mystical sort of way, had said to us:

"It is impossible for a mind so lofty as M. Thiers' to be satisfied with vague philosophical

arguments about the future life. He is an old man. I must try to bring him over to our views."

And, the wish being father to the thought, she very skilfully, during lunch, turned the conversation on the Gospels:

"The most beautiful book that was ever written!" she cried.

I can still hear M. Thiers, in his little piping voice, answering:

"I beg your pardon, madame; there is one even more beautiful; and that is the Manual of Epictetus!"

My mother did not wait for more. She at once passed from religion to politics.

The next day she wrote to her most intimate confidant, M. de Falloux:

"Our dear M. Thiers again used his famous phrase, 'What we want is the United Monarchy.'"

He had left Rochecotte bequeathing this hope to the deluded coalitionists, not before writing the following sentence in the visitors' book:

"A bright day in one of the darkest years of my life—the darkest, perhaps!

"ROCHECOTTE, *October*, 1870."

Four months later, almost to the day, some one came tapping at my door at Bordeaux.

"Who is there?"

It was M. le Duc Decazes, who had called to ask his young colleague to act as his witness. He was on his way, on behalf of the Orleans princes, to beg their father's old minister to permit their return to France. Ten minutes later, we were at the Hôtel de France. M. Thiers was lunching in private with his sister-in-law and his wife. He had us shown in at once, without ceremony, as old friends to whom one is always at home. But no sooner had the Duc Decazes formulated his request than the head of the executive power turned pale and, from pale, livid; then, taking hold of the first plate that his hand fell upon, he flung it with all his might across the dining-room and cried:

"Don't let your princes come to this country, or I'll have them shot!" (*sic*).

M. Thiers had thrown off the mask. From that moment, M. Decazes and I had not the least illusion left. The united monarchist of 1866 had ceased to work for the Monarchy: he was working for himself and for himself alone!

The old champions of the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle did not all feel as we did:

"You don't know how to take him," they said.

They, who had so often heard his diatribes

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against the Empire and his dithyrambs in favour of the United Monarchy, could not believe that the sweets of power had so soon and to such an extent triumphed over the arguments and convictions of a lifetime.* To convince them for good, a supreme effort was needed on the part of the Comte de Falloux, the man who ruled them one and all. He, therefore, accompanied by my mother and their friend, the Duchesse de Galliera, herself the daughter of the Marchese di Brignole-Sala, late ambassador of the King of Sardinia to H.M. Louis-Philippe, went down to Versailles, determined to force the last word out of M. Thiers.

The scene was terrible. My mother often told me how she saw the giant that was her friend fall upon that little old pigmy and call him a wretch, a traitor, a cut-throat and, generally speaking, all the names which well-bred people are accustomed to employ on such occasions. Of course, this scene served no purpose whatever, except to open the eyes of the two ladies who witnessed it.

About the same time, M. le Comte de Cham-

* It was some time after this that General Changarnier, who never spoke of the Republic without calling it "the slut," accused Thiers in open parliament of "senile ambition."

Photo. Ad. Braun & Co.

PAULINE DE TALLEYRAND-PÉRIGORD, MARQUISE DE CASTELLANE
(*Mother of the Author*).

bord, performing a movement in the opposite direction to that executed by M. Thiers, struck up a hymn in honour of the White Flag in a justly celebrated manifesto. The Marquis de la Ferté thought it due to his dignity to send in his resignation as his sovereign's legal representative.

Everything gave way together. Of the great monarchist effort made by the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle, nothing remained, beyond the memory of some obvious cases of good-will and the proof of treasons that were all the more bitter inasmuch as they were wholly unexpected. M. Thiers, who had ceased to be its idol, bore no grudge against those who belonged to it. A few days after the 24th of May, 1873, meeting me in one of the galleries of the National Assembly, he put out his hand and said:

"You're a sensible fellow; you'll come back to us."

What did not come back was the dream cherished by so many eminent people. With the aid of an astounding sleight of hand, the knowing thimble-rigger had said to the pea:

"Pass!"

And the pea had passed without resistance.

3

Though deprived of its political glamour, my mother's *salon* nevertheless retained one of the most characteristic stamps which it had borne from the beginning: the stamp of religion. I was about to say the clerical stamp and that would have been wrong, for there was never a company at the same time more faithful and more carping than that which frequented the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle. It had come into being immediately after the publication of the "Syllabus" and at once espoused the *distinguos* of those who, avoiding professions of faith as not only useless, but positively dangerous, strove to convince the main body of the public that the "Syllabus" was a mere effort of the papal fancy and not intended to modify in any respect the relations existing between Catholics and the states to which they belonged.

At the head of these prudent men marched the Bishop of Orleans, a sort of general commanding-in-chief of those who believed there was no longer any chance of dispelling the spirit of the Revolution by a process of evaporation. Behind him, in the ranks, in addition to a few French prelates who made it their business to

criticize the pontifical language, came a crowd of laymen, half fathers of the Church and, at the same time, great apostles of freedom of thought and, especially, of speech: such men as Melun, Augustin Cochin, Falloux and Montalembert, although the last, who was the best-known of them all, because of his earlier struggles against ultramontanism and the Roman *curia*, which was its expression, was by this time reduced, if not to inaction, at least to raising his voice but seldom, owing to the premonitory symptoms of the disease which was prematurely to remove him from our midst.

Mgr. Dupanloup possessed all the qualities of a successful general: ardour, prudence, courage and will. Moreover, he was a wonderful trainer of men and had a soul profoundly imbued with religious scruples: a poet's soul in a soldier's body. Brought up under his eyes and educated by his care, I had from my childhood witnessed the prodigious consumption of men which he had made and was then engaged in finishing: the Abbé Hetsch, whom he had placed at the head of his little seminary and who succumbed in ten years to the difficulties of his task; the Abbé Lagrange, who should have led a retired life in the modest bishopric of Chartres and whom he

kept trotting about like a beast of burden; Mgr. Chapon, now Bishop of Nice, who nearly lost his life in his service; and a host of priestlings who, coming to him in first-rate condition, soon left him for good, anæmic and in want. This hard man, with the iron temperament and constitution, was endowed with a virginal candour. He believed in the efficacy of the spoken word! It is true that his own words were particularly eloquent. His liquid voice penetrated to the inmost fibres of his hearers. He delighted in the company of children, believing of the children of that period (they have made some little progress since) that they had as yet betrayed no cause and dishonoured no cause. Profoundly convinced of the benefits of religion, he one day let fall from the tribune in the National Assembly this fine and striking aphorism:

"You pretend that religion is threatening you! How can it threaten you when you possess none?"

Terribly busy and restless, with his lance always levelled, travelling from Paris to Rome and from Rome to Paris, pleading, thundering, denouncing the double game which the Empire was playing with the Pope, he but seldom made

his appearance in my mother's drawing-room. But, though his person was absent, his spirit and his doctrine held full sway, a spirit and doctrine of sound toleration, which contained the whole policy dear to Pius IX.'s successor, Leo XIII. A few years later, they were to force themselves upon the Catholic Church; and, where a few over-zealous souls had seemed to behold conspirators and heretics, the whole of the Catholic world now saw nothing but foreseers and forerunners.

It would be a great mistake to picture those who were at that time described and who described themselves by the expressive name of liberal Catholics as knights panoplied in devotion more or less sincere. I knew them all, saw them all at work. They were, above and before all, good Christians, who, struck by the distance at which the Catholic Church was lagging behind modern society, did their utmost to make the hands of the clock point to the real time. From 1865, the year of the proclamation of the "Syllabus," until the meeting of the Vatican council in Rome, they gave vent to one long growl. It was as though they had a premonition of the storm which was gathering and about to burst over the affairs of God. Already the

most alarming symptoms of dechristianization were declaring themselves. Renan had written his "Life of Jesus" and was about to be made a Senator! Littré had solicited the honours of the French Academy and obtained them! Mgr. Dupanloup felt that he ought to send in his resignation then and there. He and his disciples ascribed all these misfortunes to the ultraism of the people about Pius IX. rather than to Pius IX. himself and they strove to stir up opinion against what they called equally dangerous and useless provocations. Upon minds thus disposed, the sound of a bell announcing the time of meeting of a council whose object was the definition of the doctrine of papal infallibility, to be followed by its solemn proclamation before the whole of Christendom, produced the effect of a death-knell. So all the efforts made to maintain the Catholic Church in the general movement of things were to end in this! Honest people like themselves saw what was dear to them above all other things in the world, their Church, crumbling away in an ever-increasing unpopularity; and, alas, there was no remedy! What were they to do? What was to become of them? Mgr. Dupanloup had left for Rome and was there arguing the inexpediency of the

step with the ardour of a man of conviction, accustomed to treat the affairs of this world as a practical person and not a mystic. It was at this time that the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle assumed its most expressive aspect. It literally flew into a rage, following the example of the great bishop. Every evening there were groans, very nearly threats. M. Daru, the minister for foreign affairs, who was himself not far from being a liberal Catholic, was called upon to protest, nay, even to act by threatening the Pope with the withdrawal of the French army of occupation. Lest I should give pain to a family that is entitled to every consideration—for none was ever more loyally Catholic—I will not mention the name of the man who made the suggestion that the Empire should embark on this campaign; but I declare that I heard it extolled by one of the most illustrious standard-bearers of liberal Catholicism of that period, without his colleagues' being in the very smallest degree scandalized. All this coterie of saintlike men would inevitably, in their love for the Church, have drifted into unorthodoxy, but for a faith so assured that it protected their persons against any sort of intellectual insubordination. The most combative among them were Père Gratry, the Comte

de Falloux and M. Augustin Cochin; the others —M. de Meaux, M. de Carné, Messieurs Hilaire and Charles de Lacombe and M. de Cumont— acted, in a manner of speaking, as their mouthpieces and their aides-de-camp.

Père Gratry was an Oratorian, that is to say, a member of a community in which the priests lead an independent life. He had the most peaceful manners in the world. His eyes were perpetually veiled by a sort of mystic haze and he appeared to inhabit another planet than that of which he was really a denizen. His candid soul was always soaring aloft. How could he set to work to come down to earth again and arm himself *cap-à-pie?*

Mgr. Dupanloup said to him, before leaving for Rome:

"I entrust the fort to you in my absence; hold it!"

And Père Gratry exclaimed:

"From this day forward, I am a soldier!"

And, from that day forward, he feverishly applied himself to the study of his new profession. One morning, when he was at my mother's, at Rochecotte, we saw him come in to lunch, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"What is the matter, father?"

"I have just discovered the *cahiers* of 1789! They are wonderful!" And, seeing a smile on my lips, "Don't you think so?" he asked.

He then confessed to us that he had never read them before that morning, that he had never heard of them, that he did not even know that they existed. And, arguing from his new discovery, he began to draw hundreds of most topical conclusions against the approaching proclamation of the infallibility of the Pope:

"How can you make a people that has so ardently longed for its complete liberty accept the idea that the word of one man can, at a given moment, close all mouths? You might as well try to tempt the devil!"

And, singing the praises of the revolution which had brought all this about (at that time the French Revolution had not yet gone out of fashion), he made the expediency of the new dogma spend one of the worst quarters of an hour that it had yet passed through. From that day, Père Gratry was changed from the gentle lamb that he had been into a rabid sheep. But, all the same, he was not for a moment insubordinate. He denied nothing; he contented himself with opposing everything, recognizing that it was for Providence to speak the last word

in defence of Its interests; and this delightful creature continued to fix his gaze upon the stars, resolved both to raise a protest, which he looked upon as the performance of a duty, and to bow respectfully before the council's decree as soon as the council had spoken. This, in fact, is what he did. Never was there a more submissive rebel, for the moment the new dogma was pronounced, "We are a pack of asses!" he declared. Nor should I think of blaming him for his opinion.

Père Gratry's candour often took a delightfully poetic form. I remember once hearing from his lips a metaphor which, although not in the least algebraical, gave us a glimpse of a wonderful apotheosis of Christ:

"A day will come," he said, "when a telegram despatched from the earth will proclaim the name and glory of Jesus in every planet at the same hour and the same minute!"

And, to give more strength to his assurance, at least by apparent truths, he developed for our benefit a whole system of progress, which he termed "progress by curves," in which those who descended too low became subject to an ascensional force of which Nature held the secret and were therefore always certain of rising higher

than the initial point from which they had started.

All this went to make Père Gratry quite the most charming man that it was possible to meet. When he passed away, prematurely, in 1872, my mother lost not only the most fascinating talker of her *salon*, but also the most original and the most faithful of her friends.

From Père Gratry to Augustin Cochin, the distance was infinitesimal, or rather there was no distance at all. The same simple faith, the same candour, the same liberalism. When Cochin entered a room, it was as though something of the Church entered with him; and he at once gave an impression of saintliness. It was obvious that St. Francis of Assisi and St. Vincent de Paul must have had sky-blue eyes like his and worn the same celestial look. As a firmly convinced Catholic, but, at the same time, a member of the Paris middle-class, he had in his blood all the elements—but for a fear lest the expression might give offence, I would say all the *stigmata*—that denote the perfect liberal Catholic. He bore even the outward mark of one: the legendary grey comforter which for twenty years gave an appearance of their own to all the adherents of the cause. The *salon* in the Rue de

Grenelle was, therefore, the very place for him; and he may be said to have been its ornament until his death. He was seen at his best leaning against the tall mantelpiece, dropping pungent anecdotes about the bench of bishops created by the Empire, about those, in particular, who were called the courtier prelates. No one could tell a story more charmingly than Cochin: that he was not a member of the French Academy was most certainly due to the fact that those whose mission it is to introduce literary and other stars to it had not heard him talk. Well, this exquisite man, this true believer died, without the shadow of a doubt, of the apprehensions caused by the events of the day. It was quite certain, in the minds of those who knew him intimately, that a sudden melancholy overcame him from that time forth, drying up the vital sources within him. I do not generally believe in people who die of love. If anything could make me do so, it would be the death of Augustin Cochin: true, the object of his love was Christ and not one of His human creatures.

This adept in liberal doctrine was, if not the most listened to and followed, at least the most beloved by all those who had appointed themselves its chief apostles. One thing, however,

made them distrust, if not his character, at least the soundness of his judgment. From 1866 onwards, that is to say, from the period when the Second Empire began to wear the mask of liberty, Cochin betrayed a sympathy for the Republic which at first surprised his collaborators and then provoked them to unconscious smiles at the discovery of such a regrettable leaning. The Falloux, the Montalemberts, the Carnés, the Lacombes, the Léon Lavedans and all who then figured in the sacred battalion were anything rather than republicans; and it must also be remembered that, at this date, in 1870, two distinct elements were literally rubbing shoulders in my mother's *salon:* the religious element, tainted with independence; and the royalist element, tainted with infallibility. Each time that Augustin, as he was familiarly called, ventured to sing a stanza in honour of the Republic, M. de la Ferté and M. Thiers, who had not yet turned his coat, M. de Falloux and the Comte de Mérode (the brother of Pius IX.'s minister for war) looked at him with a certain air as though to say:

"Oh, my friend! If you had only seen it at work as closely as we have!"

And he went away, escorted to the door by a

thousand pleasant gibes. Which was right, he or they? Leo XIII., the last commander-in-chief of liberal Catholicism, would have seemed to think that it was he. It may happen, in spite of all, that his successor, Pius X., will yet hold the same language. On that day, the little jokes of which Cochin was the victim will disappear and the intellectual halo that shone upon his brow will become absolutely pure and stainless.

But, of all these soldiers in the cause of Christ, the one whose character stood out most clearly in the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle was certainly M. de Falloux: "Falloux, the root of which is *fallax*," as Louis Veuillot said, one day when he had received a sound drubbing at his hands; Falloux, as I, in my turn, will say, who had the great courage to connect his name with a liberty so tenacious of life that it took more than fifty years to destroy it. He, at least, had the gift of making disciples and of perpetually enlisting defenders of the cause he served. How often have I heard him develop his famous theory:

"We must be careful not to confuse *the* Revolution with other revolutions."

And, almost every evening, he returned to his favourite theme, hinting that the Church, like other institutions, must move with the times,

under pain of perishing of atrophy; that, certainly, the liberty to do evil was incompatible with the principles on which she is founded; but that to proclaim this too loudly would serve no good purpose and would involve the danger of stirring up against her all those who are not accustomed—and there are many of them—to distinguish between the thesis and the hypothesis. As they listened to him, all those present applied what had just been said behind the scenes to the policy of Pius IX. and thereupon seemed to address to the Pope some such prayer as this:

"O Pope, defend yourself and us as well by the means which everybody employs, for you have no others at your disposal!"

M. de Falloux, who was of Angevin extraction, derived from the soil whence he sprang that sincere religious disposition of which certain people have pretended that he made a show in order to shine in its reflex light; whereas, in reality, it had risen in his veins like the natural sap that issues from certain soils. I may add that, notwithstanding his distaste for the oratorical methods of the Inquisition, he never, even in the thick of his opposition to the papal policy, ceased to show himself a respectful and submissive son of his Church. It is to be remarked

that at no point of his struggles was he the object of the least censure.

"His brother saw to that," some have said.

His brother? Oh, poor man! With his effeminate appearance, his curled wig and his short pink-satin cassock, he looked more like the Abbé de Choisy of sprightly memory than a nineteenth-century priest. And yet he was a cardinal of the Holy Roman Church!

"*Faro un cardinale che farà ridere il mondo,*" said Pius IX., one day.

It was the only revenge which the Pope took upon the fiercest critics of his attitude towards the secular powers.

M. de Falloux was one of the most assiduous of the regular frequenters of my mother's *salon;* and, strange to say, while many there blamed him *in petto* for raising his protest too loudly, all enlisted under his banner and followed him. The fact is that he was a wonderful trainer of men. There was something magnetic in his voice and in his gestures that soon turned his listeners into adherents. During the twenty-five years that the reign of Pius IX. lasted, he led the campaign against ultraism, come what might; for this politician had a policy: it was logical, independent and it never varied. No

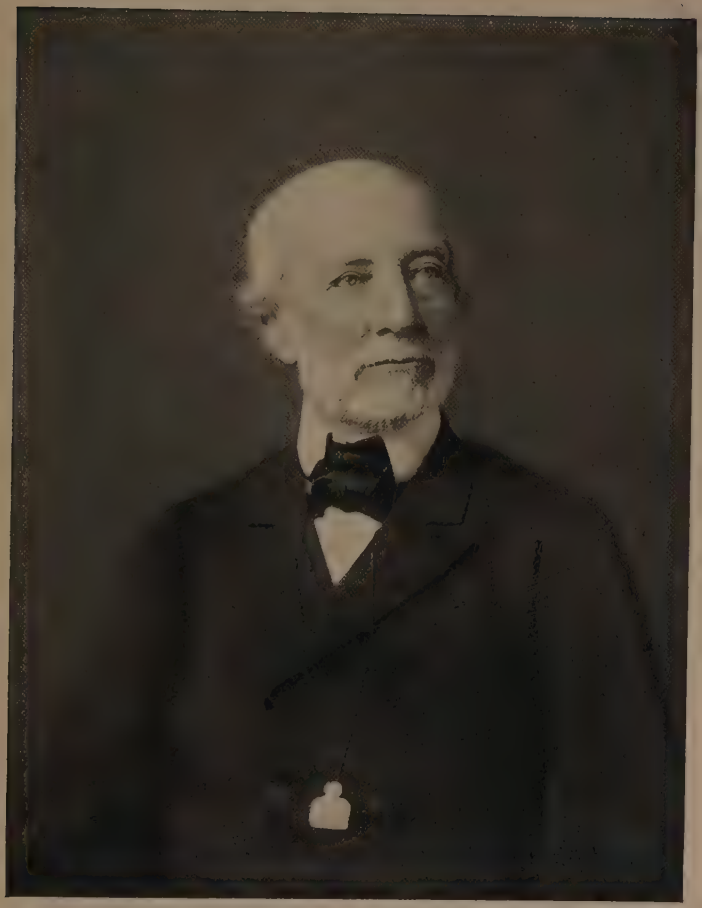


Photo. A. Liébert.

ALFRED FRÉDÉRIC PIERRE COMTE DE FALLOUX.

one was more frequently insulted by decent people than he; but so deep were his convictions that no sneers, no insults ever succeeded in disturbing him. Pre-eminently a man of the world, witty, agreeable, nay, even gallant, he added to all this a well-bred courtesy which accompanied him wherever he went and which, for twelve years, gave to my mother's *salon*, the only one he frequented, the stamp of the charming assemblies of former days. Thanks to M. de Falloux, this *salon* was the last in which the guests still contrived to talk: true, considering the gravity of the events that took place before their eyes, they all had something to say.

4

The picture of this ardently liberal and, at the same time, passionately Catholic society would be incomplete if I did not add the portrait of the great ladies who never ceased to fill it with their wit and charm. My mother first. None knew better than she the art of keeping a *salon*. All the guests were received with the same question:

"Well, monsieur, what news have you brought us to-day?"

And, turning from one to the other, she made the answer trickle through the company, some-

times adding her own comments to those of the hearers. It is a difficult art to make people talk; and the first essential is to know how to listen to them. Mme. de Castellane had learnt it from her mother, that astonishing Duchesse de Dino to whom M. de Talleyrand had left the task of setting the diplomacy of the whole of Europe talking before him, in his drawing-room at Vienna, in 1814, though she was barely twenty at the time.

My mother practised that art of conversation as if she had it in her blood, with an incredible graciousness, always blaming facts and never persons. Not one of her guests would have thought of touching upon his neighbour's reputation in her presence, still less of injuring it, however lightly. The lofty political and religious spheres in which it was their habit to soar kept them from any temptation to stoop to petty worldly backbiting, which gives only the outward appearance of wit to those who indulge in it. Nor would my mother have suffered it for a moment; for never, at any period, had a bitter word fallen from her lips. She was much too good a Christian to have recourse to such paltry shifts. Thanks to her, the conversation in her drawing-room never fell from this high level.

She was assisted in keeping it at that level by four or five women who, all of them, left their impress on political or Church matters in the course of the last century. In the first rank stood the Marquise de la Ferté, the same whom I introduced to the reader at the beginning of this narrative. She was the wife of the Paris representative of him whom we called the King ; and there was something sibylline in the general reticence of her personality, combined with certain stilted methods in her way of assuming it, which was admirably suited to the seriousness of the part which she aspired to play. As the political directress of an essentially stiff and formal society, she had deliberately substituted the fashion of flat *bandeaux* for that of the ringlets dear to Louis-Philippe. When she entered the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle in the evening, accompanied by her husband, the room immediately received a faint atmosphere of royalty. She herself was so deeply steeped in it that the conversation, even though led by a Montalembert or a Falloux, at once took another direction ; and the Church yielded precedence to the Monarchy. The Marquise de la Ferté all her life remained the daughter of M. Molé, that is to say, of a man who, if he had

had his way, would have reconciled the Bourbons and the d'Orléans: God and the devil!

The Duchesse de Galliera came next. She also, though an Italian, belonged to the monarchical faction. She was, as I have said, the daughter of the Marchese di Brignole-Sala, who had been ambassador from the King of Sardinia to the King of the French. All her youth was spent in France; after her marriage, her choice of residence was generally fixed in Paris: this made her, too, a Frenchwoman and a royalist, but a royalist very much "up-to-date." She came several times a week to vent in her friend's house the anger which M. le Comte de Chambord's constant acts of resistance caused her. The accuracy of her judgment would then shine forth, instilling into her hearers the intelligent moderation which they sometimes lacked. A tonsured king! She would suffer no such expression, while intimating, however, that thrones in our time were not to be won except at the point of intelligence. And soon these reflections, inspired by common-sense, were drowned in a half-slumber, complicated with delicious distractions, for the monopoly of which she was in the habit of contending with Mme. Thiers.

The other ladies who came oftenest to my

mother's belonged to the second faction, the Catholic faction. There was Princess Wittgenstein, a daughter of Bariatinski, the victor of Shamyl. She was beauty made woman! And, nevertheless, all soul! And, as she had an exceptional leaven of powers of will and command in the blood that flowed in her veins, it was she who, in the heart of that select society, seized upon the monopoly of stimulating the others, inspiring their protests, dictating them, if need be, and keeping the sacred fire alight in all like a simple vestal, with any amount of faith superadded! Princess Wittgenstein remained one of the two or three official priestesses of the little church which had the Dupanloups, Montalemberts, Cochins and Falloux as its faithful lights.

There was still another woman who reigned at our meetings, Mrs. Augustus Craven, *née* La Ferronnays—Pauline, as they all called her—whom we disrespectful youngsters had acquired the habit of describing by the nickname of *Ti possible*,* thus immortalizing an interjection to which we had observed that she resorted at every opportunity. A Frenchwoman by birth, an Englishwoman by marriage, she had settled in

* *Est-il possible?* This was also the nickname bestowed by King James II. for the same reason, on his son-in-law, Prince George of Denmark.—*Translator's Note.*

Paris during the times of memorable struggles; she at once sought my mother's friendship, which, for that matter, had long been assured her; and she came to take up, in the midst of this society of true believers in distress, a soldier's post which her personal charm and her zeal entitled her to claim. She was a timid soldier, it is true, too timid to assume the responsibility of offering advice or censure.

Whom else shall I name? There was Lady Herbert, who gave the sacred phalanx the benefit of her British tenacity; the Princesse Henri de Ligne, steeped through and through in the liberalism of the bishops of Belgium, her second country; Mme. Augustin Cochin, who, hypnotized by the honeyed speech of her husband, never uttered a word of objection, still less of blame, against the methods of action which he extolled; and the Comtesse de Montalembert, whose brother, Mgr. de Mérode, occupied in Rome the inconsequent position of a cassocked minister for war, dividing his time between guns and altar-cruets, and who herself did not, under her feminine garb, look so very different from a stout-hearted soldier!

Lastly, there was Princess Marceline Czartoriska, the most pampered and sought-after of all,

the one who was never mentioned in the *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle by any other name than *La Délicieuse!* An ardent Catholic and no less ardent a musician, she was the charm of that society which she consented to entertain with melodies that seemed to have dropped straight from heaven. She was the adopted daughter of the great Chopin and, by her own admission, continued his work. A few years earlier, in a Roman drawing-room, I had seen Liszt, one evening, suddenly go on his knees before her and, prostrate, kiss the folds of her skirt as he listened to her playing! We liberal Catholics, who, liberals and Catholics though we were, were none the less men, would gladly have done as much; and I am not even sure that I did not, on a certain evening, surprise M. de Falloux in the same posture while she was executing a mazurka of her master's! I hasten to add that, at that time, she was fifty-five years of age and that her gallant admirer was not a day less than seventy.

5

My mother went every summer to Évian and the little colony moved there with her. Here, under that sky where one saw nothing but mountain-tops, all these people, accustomed to

"high" thinking, found the atmosphere which was most in harmony with their state of mind. Princess Wittgenstein owned the villa of Mon Abri at Ouchy, opposite Évian, a coincidence which still further increased the number of visitors.

This seems to me a fitting place to introduce a personage who has not yet been mentioned in the course of this narrative, but who could not be banished from it without injustice, for (though but few suspected the fact) she was one of the inspirers of the religious policy so brilliantly preached, for ten years, in my mother's drawing-room. I am speaking of the Empress Augusta, the wife of William I.

The Duchesse de Dino, my grandmother, whose marriage with the eldest of M. de Talleyrand's nephews, soon after the meeting of the Emperors at Erfurt, was the price paid for the services rendered by the famous diplomatist to Alexander I., had retired, after her uncle's death, to Germany, deciding to settle in the country where she was born and where her childhood had been spent. It was then that she became acquainted with the young Weimar princess, with whom she formed an intercourse which their common affection for M. de Bacourt,

formerly first secretary to the Prince of Benevento, only served to stimulate. My mother, therefore, also knew her in the most natural way possible; and, knowing her, loved her. She loved her because she had a profoundly religious mind and, all her life long, she cherished the secret hope of converting her to Catholicism, an enterprise in which it is not so very certain that she did not succeed. A weekly correspondence began between them, treating of little besides the next life; it was continued until the death of the Empress, who was the first to pass away. They shared the same anxieties; and it is not rash to declare that, at times of *Kulturkampf* on the one hand and of uncompromising attitudes of the Roman *curia* on the other, they often mingled their tears together. In any case, the royal common-sense of Goethe's fellow-countrywoman certainly had as much effect, if not more, upon my mother's political habit of mind as the general atmosphere in which her other friends moved. For that matter, several of them had joined their intimacy, such as Princess Wittgenstein, Mrs. Craven and others. These ladies formed a clan among themselves, the doctrines of which had more influence upon the religious world of the time than they themselves ever knew.

Thanks to these effusive relations with an ardently French Frenchwoman, Queen Augusta learnt to love France. She proved it by her personal and repeated interferences on behalf of our unfortunate soldiers captured during the war of 1870. The fact that she was full of pity for their sufferings, to the extent of hearing the German newspapers insinuate that she was an indifferent German, is honourably due to her French friendships and to that for my mother in particular.

It is true that the poor woman sometimes had strange ways of showing her admiration. In the summer of 1878, the Empress had come *incognito* to spend a few days with Princess Wittgenstein at Mon Abri. My mother, who was very unwell, was not able to go to Switzerland; and the Empress came to Évian instead. At my mother's request, I went, with some reluctance, to fetch her at Ouchy. When we set foot on shore at Évian, chance brought us face to face with a detachment of French *pioupious*, clad in the traditional blue tunics and the no less traditional red trousers.

"Poor dear little soldiers! I haven't seen them since 1871!" cried the Empress, greatly touched.

JACQUES VICTOR ALBERT DUC DE BROGLIE.

I very nearly made her my bow upon the spot. Fortunately, I remembered in time that tact was not the most prominent virtue of the Germans; and the imperial exclamation appeared to me a proof of sympathy for France of a peculiar character, as indeed it was.

6

Such was the society on the forefront of which might have been inscribed the words, "To the union of religion and liberty."

From Lacordaire, its founder, to Pope Leo XIII., who granted its letters of naturalization, it had lasted for over thirty years, during a portion of which my mother's drawing-room was one of its favourite meeting-places. What was its work? What remains of it? A Church triumphant, purely and simply! Triumphant in England and in the United States of America, where she is incessantly making recruits; triumphant in the cradle of Protestantism, the German Empire; triumphant, lastly, even in France, where the sectaries of every class dare not deliver a frontal attack and make crafty turning movements against her, in the uncertain hope of dislodging her from her positions.

I can still see my mother, on the 20th of February, 1878, at her country-house of Rochecotte, where we were gathered, falling on her knees in her drawing-room upon the arrival of a telegram from one of the most enlightened priests of the archdiocese of Paris, M. l'Abbé Bernard, the last official chaplain of the École Normale, and containing these two words:

"*Habemus pontificem!*"

Cardinal Pecci was so much the pope dreamt of by the liberal Catholics that all those connected, however distantly, with the school needed but the word *pontificem* to guess the new pontiff's name. For them there was but one *pontifex*, one alone, and that was Leo XIII., so great was his reputation in the Catholic world for liberalism and moderation.

The *salon* in the Rue de Grenelle did not long survive this glorious accession. Death began to make cruel gaps in its midst. Already Montalembert, Cochin, Dupanloup were no more. My mother did not relinquish the sacred propaganda to which, for fifteen years, she had been in the habit of devoting herself; but she ceased to live in a Paris which had become really too uncouth for a lady of quality who, since her childhood, had never been connected with

CHARLES FORBES COMTE DE MONTALEMBERT.

causes of other than the most exalted order. The distance was too great, between M. de Talleyrand and M. Grévy; nor was any new voice preparing to continue the fiery accents of the Lacordaires and Ravignans. The great apostles had gone on strike!

My mother died far removed from all this declining zeal. With her disappeared a whole world, or, better, a whole idea.

CHAPTER III

A MOBLOT'S NOTE-BOOK*

ROCHECOTTE, *25 August*, 1870.

A SOLDIER! Since four o'clock this afternoon! To-day, 25 August, 1870, I signed my enlistment, my voluntary enlistment, of course, for nothing but honour obliged me to contract it. And before whom was it agreed to? Before one of Napoleon III.'s prefects! If any one had told me that a month ago, I would have sent the herald of such news to blazes! I, I to come to the aid, in however small a measure, of the murderer of my country? No, no, by Jove! I mean to serve the country and the country only; and, if we succeed in saving it from the Prussians, I swear to do everything, to plot, to kill, to commit all sorts of crimes, rather than

* *Moblot* was the nickname bestowed in 1870 upon the soldiers of the *garde mobile*, a force created in 1868 and consisting of young men who did not form part of the regular army, but who were liable to serve with the colours. —*Translator's Note.*

allow it once more to become that man's chattel and the field of his humanitarian experiments! It's too much! We all, the younger men, my comrades as well as myself, will no longer endure being brought to the plight in which we are by a man of dreams and a woman of dreams; for Eugénie Montijo, his wife, is also one of the pack of lunatics who have led us in a straight line from defeat to invasion.

How shall I set about it to announce my decision to my mother and my wife? I took the decision of my own initiative, without consulting them. Not that I dreaded a word of blame or even a vague regret on their part: they have too much the hearts of Frenchwomen to oppose an act which is merely that of a good Frenchman. But, all the same, I preferred to confront them with the accomplished fact.

* * * * *

The thing has passed off in the most natural way possible. When I went in to them, I felt embarrassed how to word my confession. Suddenly and at the same time, I saw two pairs of arms opening wide and, after I had flung myself into them, I heard two voices which said, in quivering tones:

"You have done the right thing!"

Let us admit that it was right and say no more about it!

CHINON, 28 *August.*

Chinon! This is where the first battalion of the Indre-et-Loire Mobiles, to which I belong, has received orders to form. I have been made a captain straight away. How did that happen? I don't know. If it was my spirits that they reckoned on, they did right, for I feel that I have an inexhaustible dose of them; if it was for any other reason, they were wrong. Having never handled a Chassepot in my life, I am incapable of teaching others what I do not know myself.

However, we shall see. Not to mention that they have put a real professional officer under me as a lieutenant in the company to the command of which I have been appointed. Only a few weeks ago, he was still in the marines! The world is upside down! But what can keep its feet nowadays in this unfortunate country, made over to the jackasses?

The muster of the men was fixed for ten o'clock. They were all there by the stroke of ten, married men and bachelors. Not a protest, not a tear! Good-humour, almost gaiety!

Come, that's a good omen! They were taken to the clothes-shop. When they came back, dressed in a plain jacket and yellow half-boots, they looked just as much like real soldiers as the linesmen of the regular army, so true is it that the cowl makes the monk in every trade, except, it would seem, among the monks themselves! On the other hand, they are not pleased with their rifles, which are old out-of-date blunderbusses. We shall exchange them for Mausers or Remingtons in a few days.

As I walk along, I find myself face to face with an officer in a képi with four stripes of gold braid. His hair is quite white. I salute; he stops:

"Who are you?"

"Captain 1st company 1st battalion 88th Mobiles."

"Meet at twelve, officers' mess, Hôtel de France! *Au revoir!*"

Who is this lordly person? I learn that his name is Worms de Romilly. After all, he looks a gallant fellow! A fine soldierly head!

CHINON, *5 September.*

This morning, the men were feverishly fighting for the newspapers, snatching them out of one

another's hands. Oh, what awful news! The army captured! MacMahon wounded! So all those rumours of death were true which filtered yesterday evening through the hubbub of news from nobody knows where! How terrible! One thing, however, is consoling: that abominable Empire has ceased to exist. Now that it has gone, we can still perhaps save France! With the Empire there, that would certainly be impossible!

6 September.

Yesterday evening, I took advantage of the fact that this place is only fifteen miles from my home to get on my horse and ride at full speed to carry the cheering news to my mother and my wife. I am sorry now that I did! The two ladies pulled me up with unheard-of violence in the midst of my delight. When I protested:

"That will do, that will do!" they cried. "Passion is blinding your eyes! A nation that rebels against its rulers in the presence of the enemy is guilty of a crime. In a case like this, the first victory to be gained is the victory over one's self. The rest are of secondary importance; they can only come afterwards."

I opened wide eyes. . . . I did not understand.

One day, no doubt, posterity will explain this phenomenon of spite talking louder than reason.

At night, as I rode back across the moors, crammed with the different odours of life, that separate the Loire from Chinon, a smell of corpses rose to my nostrils nevertheless, while echoes of mingled rejoicings and tears, clashing together, reached me from every side.

7 September.

At the mess, this morning, they were roaring and shouting. I saw the second lieutenant of the 3rd company take his sword and rip up a coloured engraving on the wall of the dining-room, representing the Emperor in a general's uniform, saying:

"There, that's one for you!"

And all the officers shook their fists at the portrait and applauded noisily.

I saw another spit in its face, shouting:

"Hurrah for the Republic!"

"Badinguet's* natural daughter!" yelled a wag.

A general laugh greeted this piece of imbecility. Decidedly the Republic does not seem in the odour of sanctity either among my brother-officers.

At the muster of the men, it was a different

* The nickname of Napoleon III.—*Translator's Note.*

sight. They moved about with heads lowered eyes staring and discouraged, as if something had been taken from them. They felt that the cause so dear to their kith and kin was lost. The purely French essence of their patriotism is not yet free of all the dross that surrounds it. Patience! That will come! It is impossible that Bonapartism should survive the disgrace of the Bonapartes.

LANGEAIS, 8 *September.*

With men like these, where would one not go? They have not yet been soldiers for ten days; and look at them already marching like veterans! Fourteen miles from Chinon to Langeais covered in less than four hours; and not one straggler! Trumpets distributing a perpetual gaiety! Songs of a rather blackguardly type! But, hang it, men who know that soon they will have to march to their deaths have some right to forget their thoughts by calling up a vision of girls and canteen-women to their aid!

LANGEAIS, 9 *September.*

O glorious! O wonderful! Knocking this morning at the door of the new major *ad interim* of our battalion, to take his orders, I committed the imprudence of walking in before I received

GENERAL TROCHU.

leave; and what did I see? The good, honest man lying in bed with the servant-girl left in charge of the house. I must say the girl carried her patriotism rather far. I told the story at the mess, where it astonished nobody, except a second lieutenant, who exclaimed:

"Those filthy Bonapartists!"

I am quartered upon the local solicitor. A capital lodging! I find all that I wish for, except what is most necessary to a soldier, confidence. According to him and his wife, it is madness to resist, madness to defend ourselves. They are afraid, afraid for their pockets, above all. The fact is that, when the hour of ransom comes, it is their pockets that will have to provide the money. They will pay; and quite right. That is why, if I were in their place, instead of laughing at Gambetta, sneering at Rochefort, abusing Jules Favre, Trochu and all the men whom Paris has acclaimed, I would back these men with all my might in their attempts to organize the defence of the country. How different from those incorrigible egoists are all these Tourangeau peasants' sons! They might have thought themselves exempt for all time from any dues of blood towards their country; and they accept without a word, nay, with

enthusiasm, the idea that they are about to sacrifice to the saving of that vague entity which is called the motherland their welfare, their prosperity and, from one day to another, their lives. Oh, the splendid fellows!

AZAY, 20 *October.*

Great news! Gambetta has crossed the Prussian lines in a balloon! He has swept down like a cyclone upon a nation of birds; they can't get over that youthful energy! Now, instead of moaning, we shall have to march, in spite of Thiers, in spite of Crémieux, in spite of Fourichon, in spite of Glais-Bizoin, who, with their seventy-five years, or thereabouts, have succeeded, during the six weeks for which they have been our masters, merely in imbuing us with their hesitation and their timidities. Gambetta is sent to us by Paris: hurrah for Gambetta! He had better lock them all up, if they try to thwart his efforts!

Already we feel a sense of management that is certainly his work. This morning, they distributed new rifles to our men. How carefully the fellows handled them! They were told that the rifles carried two thousand yards. Without end or intermission, at the risk of

killing all the passers-by, they insisted on verifying their good reputation in the improvised ordnance-yard where we practise our shooting every evening. And the Prussians had better look to themselves. The *moblots* of the 88th are not the men to spare them. Every shot means a man polished off. They are incredibly good shots. I now know why the Touraine is such a bad country for game: all the Tourangeaux are poachers from childhood up! They will shoot the Germans with the same steady aim with which they shoot rabbits. Every day, I perceive that they are brave men and decent men. Instead of leaving us to moulder in this hole of an Azay-le-Rideau, where there is nothing to look at except chiselled stone-work, let our generals lead us to the fighting and we will show them something! This morning, we had orders to take the declarations of the married men who wished to be enrolled in the reserve company, in case we march ahead. Not one of them took advantage of the privilege offered them! Lefèvre, my sergeant-major, who is a cook in a big Paris restaurant, could find no other reply to my queries than:

"But, captain, who would cook your dinner for you?"

Azay, 27 October.

At last! We start to-morrow morning! After two months' garrison duty in every market-town of Touraine! What do we know of the soldiering trade? All that there is to know: marching, shooting, obeying! That is enough, in any case, to lick those cads of Prussians as they deserve!

On the eve of taking the field, alone with myself this evening, I swear before God that I have no merit in leaving my wife and children for the cannon's mouth. It would have taken much more than that to deaden my ears to its voice! If I am killed, my people will be left well-off; their life will be easy, to say nothing of the fact that it will derive a reflected beauty from what will be called my glorious death. But the others, all those peasants who are married, like myself, and who from afar see poverty lurking near their homes: they are the real heroes! And, when I see them so resigned, so careless of what to-morrow will bring to the beings left behind them, whom they love just as much as I love those whom I myself am leaving, then I feel sure of leading those men to victory! Provided that our guns carry as far as the

Germans'! There are nasty rumours current on this subject. And provided also that the same feelings prevail in the hearts of those officers drawn from more or less every parish as in the hearts of these peasants who are such true gentlemen! In short, I am starting full of hope. I want the battalion to make a triumphal entry into Tours to-morrow. We shall renew our jackets and shoes there. In the evening, we shall bivouac along the pavement in the high street; and, the next morning, we shall start for an unknown destination, with drums and trumpets sounding, as one starts hunting the hare. But for the difference between men and hounds, war and hunting are exactly the same thing! With this reflection, which is the truth without set phrases, I close my garrison note-book. To-morrow, I shall open a new one. Good-bye, Chinon! Good-bye, Langeais! Good-bye, Azay! Three garrisons in less than three months! You have been really too much happiness!

Tours, 28 *October.*

O horror of horrors! Metz capitulated yesterday, 27 October! 167,000 Frenchmen and three marshals laid down their arms, surrendered their flags, without firing a shot. Once more, O shame

of shames! Gambetta has branded in indignant terms the treachery of the man whom Jules Favre yesterday called "our Bazaine!" Thiers had better not think of blaming him for his levity, as he did before me to-day, in his sitting-room at the Hôtel de Bordeaux. I feel that I could not control my language a second time. In spite of his great age, I should insult him. What word did he expect Gambetta to apply to that abominable act of cowardice! A man is never, no, a man is never obliged to live! And what revolts me most in the decision of this fellow Bazaine is the number of stout-hearted men whom the traitor has associated in his infamy, in spite of themselves, and who must have submitted to it from a strict sense of duty and discipline! He has corrupted the national conscience. How can such spectacles as that leave the least enthusiasm in the hearts of our *moblots!* How are we to tell them that we are going to lead them to victory, when 167,000 well-armed men coolly abandon the soldier's uniform, like disappointed old monks casting aside their frocks! To get some idea of their feelings, I went along the rows of huts in which they are lodged. Well, in spite of all the surrenders of French flesh and blood to Prussia,

those good little raw recruits do not despair. I saw them stopping to read the proclamation in which Gambetta stigmatizes the blot that has been cast on the fair fame of France. They wept furiously, they shook their fists at invisible offenders, they behaved as sons might behave who saw their mother violated before their eyes. Say what you will, when you come to think that our race still feels full of life and is still ready to die rather than that its homes should be defiled, there must be an undercurrent of invincibility in the soul of that race, which you will find nowhere else. O brave country, which fifteen hundred years of ancestral habits have thus fashioned to sacrifice and honour!

TOURS, 29 *October.*

Here, word for word, is the strange adventure that has just happened to me. I was walking this evening through our camp, ill-lit with nondescript candle-ends. A penetrating rain kept the men inside their huts. Under favour of the darkness, suddenly I saw outlined and coming towards me some one wearing a uniform unknown to me, but having three stripes of gold braid clearly marked on the sleeves.

"Captain de Castellane?" he enquired.

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"Well, don't you think that we have had enough of all these blockheads?"

"Which blockheads?"

"Why, Crémieux! Trochu! And, above all, Gambetta! Call themselves generals! When, at the very most, they're fit to lead a humdrum life, sitting over a nice, warm fire with the wife of their minister of finance! Their minister of finance!" he chuckled. "That twopenny-halfpenny Laurier! Relying on people like that to save France! It's not serious, is it?"

"Why, yes, it's quite serious."

"Do you mean that?" he asked in amazement.

"Chance has made them the instruments of the national defence . . ."

"So, if an opportunity should come . . .?"

"An opportunity? What do you mean?"

"One could not rely on you . . .?"

"What to do?"

"Why, to lock them up, of course!"

"And put whom in their place?"

"Well, the King!"

"The King! And graft a second revolution on the first! Why, my dear fellow, you're quite mad!"

"Well, it's clear that there's nothing to be

done with you . . . and yet the thing is there, to be had for the asking! . . . And it could be done so quickly too, in less than no time!"

And he disappeared. . . .

He was well-advised. Another second and I should have had that madman or that reprobate, I am not sure which, himself arrested!

Tours, 1 *November.*

Tours . . . for ten days . . . without budging! Look here! Have we simply been put in charge of our masters? What a rotten task! I prefer to believe what I hear on every side, that we are the nucleus around which they are trying to form a new fighting unit, a flying column which will be sent to the assistance of this or that body of troops, wherever we are most wanted. We are called the Camo column, after the general commanding us . . . and thus dubbed, we are waiting . . . and assisting at the most extraordinary masquerade of which any town ever afforded the spectacle. . . . Soldiers of all arms and of all badges mixed up together, covered with stripes from head to foot; uniforms recalling those which I saw last year in Rome and which would tend to make one think that the papal zouaves had turned into the zouaves of old Crémieux, who,

Jew though he be, has taken up his abode at the archbishop's palace, where, with a serious face, he freely indulges in pious observations; red shirts of an earlier date than those of Garibaldi's bands, suddenly revived, and followed by the usual termagants; all sorts and conditions of volunteers from the west, the south, the south-west, from every point of the compass, their chests bristling with enormous daggers gleaming in the midst of embroidered blood-stained Sacred Hearts; all moving about in the height of arrogance among the wounded and the small-pox patients squatting in the railway-station or on the threshold of the churches! This town no longer looks like a city in time of war, but like a mad-house: Charenton, Bicêtre, Bedlam, anything you please. . . . And I ask myself what infection has brought me here and whether all these sinister absurdities are worth the trouble of giving one's life to assist their realization. I feel profoundly discouraged.

BEAUMONT, 10 *November*.

At last! We have secured a victory! The Bavarians have had a thrashing. . . . D'Aurelle de Paladines commanded in the battle, which was fought at about sixty miles from Tours.

Who is this D'Aurelle? An old, unknown, resuscitated man, placed on outpost duty and called back to glory by circumstances and not by talent, as, for that matter, is always glory's way. But he has been very severe on all breaches of discipline; and this was enough to bring back victory to our colours. They say that, in ten days, he had over eighty robbers of hen-roosts shot without trial! That will teach you, my lambs!

Why was it necessary that D'Aurelle should see the fruits of his victory escape him thanks to the ignorance of a cavalry general, who appears to have read the map wrong side, instead of right side up? For the same reason, no doubt, that caused us to be moved here, yesterday morning, in hot haste, as though, silly noodles that you are, the defeated Bavarians could overrun the city of Tours, which shelters your government, before first recapturing Orleans, from which they have just been driven!

You shall see, we shall still be here a fortnight hence, without having heard the least sound of a gun. This Freycinet may be a great man, but, all the same, he strikes me as having a very poor notion of geography! And then our *moblots*, who would simply love to fight, but who cannot stand being kept in one place, are grumbling and

growling at having to sleep under canvas, at the herd of lean kine which the column drags with it, at the lack of water and, above all, of wine. They are wrong, that goes without saying; they have no right to notice the ridiculous strategy which a distracted government is forcing upon them. But how can men help saying to themselves that its imbecility is leading them directly and solely towards pneumonia, typhoid or small-pox. . . . Don Quixote fighting the windmills: that is what we have been for three days, we, the Camo column! Sad, sad!

BEAUGENCY, 2 *December.*

Zounds, I asked for a day's work and here is one with a vengeance!

At three o'clock in the morning, suddenly drums and bugles sounded the reveille; then soup; then the start. We did not know where we were going, but we felt that we were marching on the guns. And never were our men in better spirits, laughing, singing, chaffing one another, so that the eighteen miles which lay between us and Tours were covered in one march, in less than four hours, without a straggler, without a complaint being heard or the shadow of a protest. At eight o'clock, we

triumphantly entered the station-yard. We heard that they were sending us to Orleans, where grave events were happening: we were not told what. At twelve, we had not yet started, so great was the block on the line. At one o'clock, the signal for departure was given at last. An immense shout of "France for ever!" issued from all the compartments; and we travelled almost without stopping to Blois.

At Blois, a prolonged halt. Nasty rumours became current. One could feel the battle! They had certainly been fighting . . . they were still fighting. And all those more or less gold-braided gentlemen — ambulance-men, surgeons, officials who swarmed on every hand —were going about with downcast faces. Could it be defeat? I refused to believe it. But we made a fresh start. It was five o'clock; and, by the time that we stopped at Beaugency, it was black darkness, a sinister darkness! Torches lighted here and there and swung from the trees looked like sentries that had come from hell.

We were about to leave the station for the town: suddenly, a shrill whistle sounded. An engine arrived at full speed. There were three men on it: the driver, the stoker and a third,

with a goat-skin wrapped round his neck. It was Gambetta! He had stayed at Orleans as late as he could, giving orders, organizing the retreat, so that it should not degenerate into a rout, and he had just risked his skin dashing down the line, before it was quite cut: for the railway was overrun with Bavarians, who shot at him like a hare as he passed. I felt that the engine ought to be placed in the Military Museum one day: it had taken part in a fine action.

"Long live Gambetta!" I cried, in a stentorian tone.

The hubbub was so great that the sound of my voice did not carry my enthusiasm beyond the ears of a few men of my company.

"Go wherever you like."

The adjutant of the regiment gave me this order from the colonel as he passed and added:

"Meet at six o'clock punctually, to-morrow morning, in the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville."

"Wherever you like," was easily said, with no one to give you an indication in the midst of the darkness. I collected my *moblots* as best I could and "forward-marched" on a reconnoitring expedition, in the midst of a train of 1,500 waggons receding upon us from the outskirts of Orleans, a sure proof that D'Aurelle's

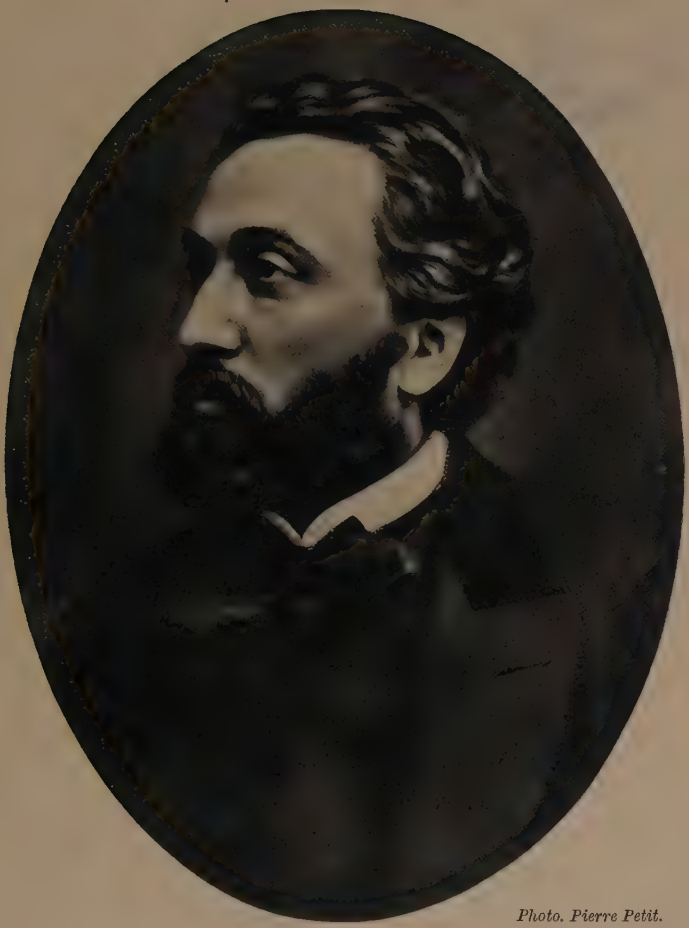


Photo. Pierre Petit.

LÉON GAMBETTA.

army was beaten. What a hideous disorder! Drivers sticking in the mire, *sacré*-ing, shouting desperate oaths! Poor worn-out horses that had come to the end of their strength! A whole population of army parasites, clinging to the convoys and making money by dealing in the stores entrusted to their keeping! A population of heartless scoundrels and dastards into the bargain! For all of them hide a contemptible cowardice behind the public service which they are supposed to perform. And yet they are necessary. For to live one must needs eat, even if it be only from time to time.

We were advancing as best we could . . . when we came to a door surmounted by a cross

"Halt!" I cried.

And I rang a lively peal on the bell.

"Who is there?" asked a woman's voice, from behind the blinds.

"M. le curé is wanted, to give the sacraments to a sick man."

I had guessed right. We were outside the presbytery. My stratagem had succeeded. The old servant came to open the door; but, seeing the rectory taken by assault by a number of unknown men armed with rifles, she fell back terror-stricken, as if in the presence of demons.

What was not thereupon my surprise to see a priest who, coming up to me, cried:

"Why, you know, my children, that everything here is yours!"

And he did his best to help us instal our men in his wooden out-house, while he generously offered me half his bed! That is how, for the first time in my life, I was admitted to the honour of sleeping with a parish-priest, which shows you that, in this wicked world, one must be prepared for everything.

They say that the pillow provokes confidences. The rector of Beaugency's did not belie tradition. Hardly were we in bed, when the old priest, putting his flickering candle near my face, said:

"Why . . .!"

"What can I do for you, M. le curé?"

"I seem to know you. Are you . . ."

"Antoine de Castellane? Just so."

"The one who used to play the organ at the Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin . . . and who had such a beautiful singing-voice?"

"The same."

"Well, see, captain, how well Providence orders things. Our grand annual firemen's festival, which takes place with great pomp in the parish church on the 3rd of December, the

feast of St. Barbara, the men's patron-saint, threatened to be spoilt this year by the suddenness of events; and now those very events will give it an unexpected brilliancy."

And the worthy man explained to me so eagerly how the news of my assistance, spread through Beaugency at dawn, would fill his church that I allowed myself to be persuaded.

Accordingly, after making sure that the regiment, on the point of departure though it was, would not start before noon, I climbed up to the organ-loft and, in my most powerful voice, bawled forth a formidable *O Salutaris*, adapted for the occasion from one of the favourite airs in a new Verdi opera, *La Forza del Destino*. The effect was immense and the collection fruitful in proportion. All Beaugency was there, much more interested in St. Barbara and her festival than in the Prussians, which proves that we all have at least two countries: the soil, the immediate witness of all our habits; and the social organism under which we have been disciplined by a long historic past. Whether we wish it or not, the first always outweighs the second in the balance of our anxieties.

After high mass, the rector gave a capital lunch to the officers of the fire-brigade, to which

the captain of mobiles was invited. And I noticed with what indifference all those people heard the funeral-knell of the guns tolling in the distance.

To-morrow morning, at five o'clock exactly, the whole regiment is to be under arms. It shall be there, that I will answer for. Far away from their little country, the men will see only the other, the great one!

5 December, evening.

To-day, 4 December, I received my baptism of fire! And there was no lack of sugar-plums at the ceremony! Balance-sheet of our losses: one major captured, one captain killed, two second lieutenants seriously wounded and over 300 men killed or wounded. This is really not bad for a start; and the regiment may look upon itself with some pride!

* * * * *

Leaving Beaugency at six o'clock, at seven we found ourselves deployed in skirmishing order along a line of two miles, with our right resting on the Loire and our left on a regiment of the line. In the distance, we could just perceive a few figures of Prussians among the hedges; but they remained stationary. Nobody

stirred; we watched one another. My company was drawn up on either side of the railway, which my orders were to defend. I barred it with a strong earthwork. Then I waited. Twelve o'clock struck on the steeple of Foinard, two or three hundred yards away. The firing began, crackling. It sounded like the teeth of thousands of saws cutting through hard stone. We replied at random; we heard, but did not see. This lasted until three o'clock. Suddenly, an immense shout! The Prussians were deciding to move forward. The bullets whistled and whistled again. The enemy roared like beasts. It is their way of giving themselves courage. Not a *moblot* gave a sign of flinching. They no longer shot at random, they shot in good earnest. And, on every hand, we heard the groans of the wounded and dying.

The Prussians came nearer and nearer! I judged them to be terribly numerous by the intensity of their fire. What was happening? And we with no bayonets to our rifles, if it should come to fighting at close quarters! I caught sight of an officer riding at full gallop just behind me. It was my staff colonel. I shouted:

"What are we to do?"

"Clear out!"

And he rode so fast that I verily believe he must still be racing along as I write. Fortunately, I had retained sufficient power over my men to persuade them that the colonel's imprudent expression was not an order for flight, but simply an order to retreat; and those brave little soldiers continued to drop around me like flies, disputing every inch of ground with the enemy. Paulze d'Ivoys had a bullet in the groin. A *moblot* was shot right through the eye; it did not kill him. In short, when night fell, all, calm and resigned, were still skirmishing, defending, foot by foot, the soil of the motherland that was swallowed up before their eyes.

We are now settled under our tents, covering Beaugency. It is a dismal night: it is snowing hard and a terrible, pitiless north wind whistles in our ears. To-day, I imagine we behaved like heroes, whereas, to-morrow. . . . ? When I think of it, however, we only did our dog duty.

In the open country, 5 December, 10 p.m.

By the light of a bivouac fire. It has been a stupid day! We were ordered to cover Beaugency; and they began by making us evacuate it! . . . The thing is a mystery! . . . The

result was that the Prussians appeared before the town at nine o'clock this morning and had only to walk in. We kept them under observation all day, determined, in case of attack, to reply . . . or, who knows, to retire a little further? . . . Fifteen hours, without stopping, under arms twice raked by invisible shells that burst over our heads without our knowing where they came from, our *moblots* are beginning to feel exasperated! Lead them to battle as much as you please: they will go; but do not wantonly make them the recording witnesses of the hesitations of a pack of old generals verging on their second childhood!

The fact is that I no longer feel the same confidence. Yesterday, I was walking about among the bullets as quietly as in my own garden; but, to-day, I could not bear the sudden attacks of an artillery hidden beyond our reach. Why should I not confess it? I was afraid. . . . Now, now, my friend, none of your jeers! Cowards are disgraced . . . except when they show themselves all the more daring and venturesome in consequence. . . .

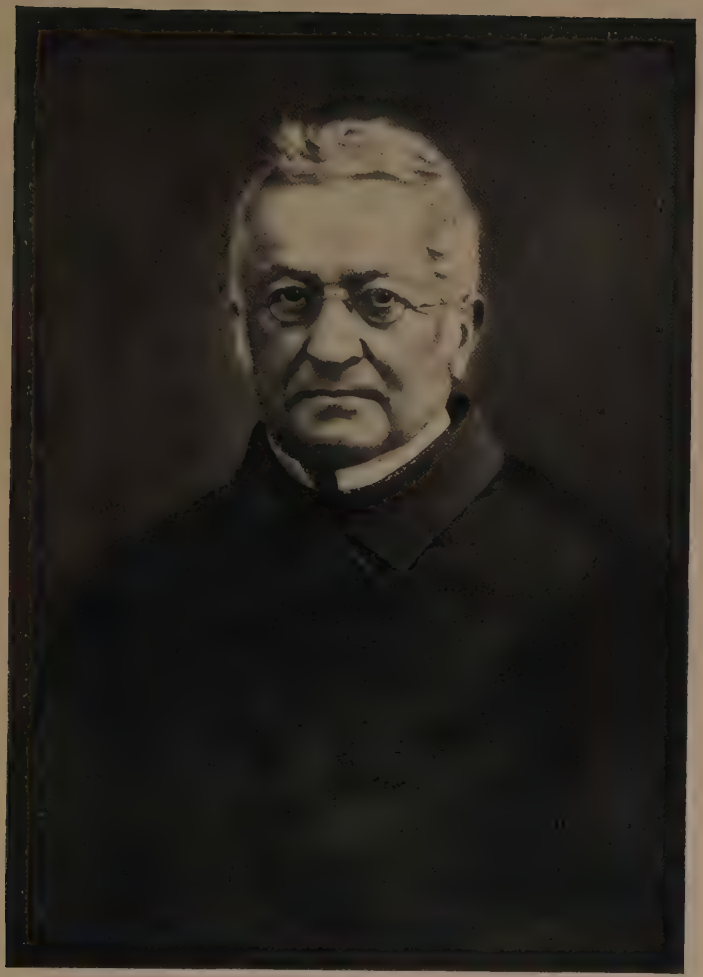
At five o'clock, the colonel ordered me to climb up the railway-embankment that shelters us as best it can, in order to search the horizon

with my field-glasses. A squad of linesmen, who happened to be there for some unknown reason, fired their forty bullets at me point-blank. I ought to be dead. Not a bit of it! The bunglers all missed me. France for ever!

And, only a little while ago, Beaugency seemed to us so far from being occupied by the Prussians that, thinking that they had evacuated it, we, a few men of good-will and I, slipped down to the toll-house gate. Ah, what a fine reception they gave us! Bang! . . . Bang! . . . Bang! If you want to be shot at, here you are! . . . It looked, on this dismal night, as if the soil of France were about to open and crack! It is now ten o'clock. Still carrying arms, what are we expecting? Who knows? And not a morsel to put between our teeth. And this snow which keeps on renewing our winding-sheet! The men are seeing blood. This will never do! I make them stamp their feet to keep warm, I tell them spicy stories. And strike up, music!

TAVERS, 8 *December.*

And we are still retiring . . . yielding the ground to the enemy without fighting. To-day, however, I saw a master-stroke. Two



LOUIS ADOLPHE THIERS.

squadrons of white cuirassiers, about 250 troopers, showed themselves on the horizon . . . when, suddenly, a machine-gun, hidden in a break in the ground, caught them on the slant. Ah, what a fine sweep it made of them! It left not one man standing! But we are all done up. We have not closed an eye nor eaten more than a biscuit or two since yesterday morning. For that matter, the Prussians seem no more eager for battle than we do. Four days of fighting satisfy them for the present. And, this evening, we are camping quietly about nine miles below Beaugency, in a village called Tavers. What has become of the other two battalions of the 88th? Strayed. How strayed? That they should stray in the van, well and good; but to the rear? Who is the dastard that commanded them like that? We shall never know, I expect. Well, it's a pity! When people give orders of that sort, they deserve to go down to posterity.

Pending the elucidation of the mystery, I have taken up my abode with the local schoolmaster. The poor man has given me his bed. He would gladly give all he possesses to save his country!

Hullo, here's the chaplain of the 88th! Sup-

pose I made my confession? Why shouldn't I? After all, I'm a believer. And forthwith I received absolution. There is really something delightful about this life of adventure. God, the Republic and the country! To be on friendly terms with all of them! Why, it's the perfection of happiness!

VENDÔME, 14 *December.*

The 13th of December provided a frightful day's work. Poor *moblots!* We were retreating in order of battle across the Beauce, which was soaked by a sudden thaw. How would those poor lads, each carrying sixty-six pounds' weight on his back, manage to drag their feet out of that quagmire? At nightfall, when I tried to count the men of my company, alas, there were only ten left, yes, ten! The poor beggars had not been equal to the effort. When a halt was called at Pontijou, it was quite dark. An icy rain was falling, piercing the ragged clothes of the panting *moblots.*

Lost in the darkness, the battalion was being slowly swallowed up in sticky mud; we sank into it to our belts. The colonel, collecting this tattered remnant of a regiment around him on the mound, shouted:

"All of you go where you please! Meet here to-morrow morning at four!"

At the same moment, a strident sound. . . . A bullet hissed through the air. Some one had fired at the colonel. That was certain. There was a ripple of excitement among the maddened men. Our unfortunate commander had been held responsible for sufferings which he was powerless to prevent. . . . He forbade us to clear the thing up and he was right. These poor wretches had exasperation in their hearts. They would have died, but they would have revenged themselves while dying.

To-day, the same ceremony as yesterday. Decidedly, in war, victory falls neither to the bravest, nor to the best shot: it falls to the best marcher. And, this evening, on reaching the gates of Vendôme, we were at last able to canton our men in the houses and barns which the townspeople liberally placed at our disposal.

CHANGÉ, 20 *December.*

At last, after six days of skirmishing, for the regiment has not once been engaged as a whole, but also after six days of suffering and unparalleled privations, we are settled in front of Le Mans, in a solid position known as the

Tuilerie. It appears that there will be no fighting for some days to come. How do they know? And yet it is a fact. They are putting us in order, reclothing us, reshoeing us. There is only one thing they do not do for us and that is to give us back our fine confidence, so cruelly deceived by certain of our leaders even more than by the elements.

I took advantage of this day of rest to go and visit the Mans field-hospital. Five of my men had been taken to it since the morning! Zounds, my friends, what a sight! Forty small-pox patients in the same camp of sheds, black in the face, hiccoughing, bringing up their intestines. And it seems that there are more than ten wards full.

I comforted them as best I could, gave them a little money and went away. As I left the hospital, I passed Mme. de B—— on the pavement. She blushed to the eyes on seeing me. I then remembered that she is the mistress of one of our great commanders. Can she have come so as to be with him? Then there are still people who think of that sort of thing? It's too bad, really!

CHANGÉ, 1 *January*, 1871.

Began the year under really delightful auspices! Shot a man—and a married man! He was a chasseur d'Afrique; he had sold his horse to a peasant for fifty francs. He died splendidly, that chasseur, refusing to have his eyes bandaged, standing up to the bullets and shouting:

"Hurrah for France!"

How is it that the distance between heroism and crime is so small? Alas for poor humanity!

When I returned to my tent, the postman handed me a note from my wife. It ran:

"Safely delivered of a boy. Many kisses."

I had made her promise to spare me any emotions that might risk slackening my courage. The brave little creature kept her word. There may be people who admire us: let them rather admire our wives! They too do their duty . . . they have hidden their tears from us! A happy new year to you, France! A happy new year to my nearest and dearest! A happy new year to all I love!

CHÂTEAURENAULT, 6 *January.*

We have been placed under direct command of "the little country postman." This is the nickname of Admiral Jauréguiberry, because of the gold-braided cap which he is never seen without and which gives him the look of a superior post-office official. There's no humbug about him. They say that things are going to move. It is high time they did. And here we are, suddenly transferred to Châteaurenault, where, it appears, there will be something for us to do. The thing that does not move is the weather. There is a wild storm raging. It is as though things in general were shedding tears.

MAYET, 14 *January.*

Oh, what a horrible night and a still worse day! Yesterday evening, at nine o'clock, the muster-bell suddenly rang. We were starting. In which direction? Nobody knew. The snowflakes whirled round us, the ground was one sheet of ice. A deathly silence all around. Evidently, we were marching to almost certain death. Soon, the men began to drop with exhaustion. A large number were left by the roadside. I was obsessed by a mortal anxiety:

we were hastening to the aid of Chanzy's army; his right wing must have been driven in. Should we arrive in time?

At five o'clock in the morning, we halted for two hours; then we marched on again and always; express followed on express; the injunctions were definite: push ahead, push ahead!

Darkness fell again, the wind roared with a great moaning sound; suddenly we came to the little village of Écommoy. My company, being the first of the first battalion, was naturally marching in front; naturally also the colonel ordered it to go and reconnoitre if the road was clear. But we were hardly within rifle-shot of the first houses when we were greeted with a hail of bullets. I fell back upon the head of the column and almost at once heard General de Curten shout:

"To Mayet!"

And we thereupon receded five miles lower down. It is now nine o'clock at night; we have been marching for exactly twenty-four hours; and we have covered an incredible distance: forty-five miles. It is from Mayet that I am uttering my cry of despair to the France of the future! To-day, 15 January, 1871, I

have assisted at the last convulsion of my country!

LAVAL, 16 *January.*

We have been marching, or rather dragging, along for a week. What has come over my dear *moblots*, but a few days since so gay, so wide-awake, so brave? Certainly, they still obey, but like soulless machines. They have really suffered too much. True, they are told that the rout which they have just witnessed would not have happened if the general commanding-in-chief had not shifted the regiment for reasons of strategy. Most certainly the 88th would not have shown themselves dastards like those who took their place in the fight. But this homage paid to their gallantry no longer touches them! Is it their fault if these weaknesses occurred? And are they to blame God for these everlasting disasters?

LAVAL, 18 *January.*

A small fight to-day, in which three battalions were engaged, but a combat of outposts only. Twenty-four killed after four hours' skirmishing! That's cheap! The Prussians only wanted to feel their way with us. The attack is giving

way! The defence is giving way! The weather is giving way! Everything's giving way, it is the end of all things!

LAVAL, 27 *January.*

They tell us that an armistice has been signed. I hurry to headquarters. The news is certain. A national assembly will be elected on the 8th of February. I feel that great things will happen there; I want to belong to it! Chanzy gives me a pass. I leave this evening for Cantal. After trying the Prussians, I shall try the electors! The wife of the registrar in whose house I am quartered says good-bye to me and adds:

"Don't forget my husband, captain. He's earned his promotion."

That's the France of the future! Drive on, coachman! Whip 'em along as fast as you can!

CHAPTER IV

IN AND AROUND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

(1871-1876)

1

I ARRIVED at Bordeaux at the end of February, immediately after the elections, on one of those golden afternoons which are of daily occurrence, at this season of the year, in the south-west part of the country. Everything was smiling. Men and things, excited by the spring breezes, seemed to think only of brightening up. Life shone everywhere, in men's faces, in the atmosphere. What a difference from the days just past! Yesterday it was the graveyard; to-day it is the resurrection, or at least the joy of making certain that one is not dead. At every street-corner there are scraps of conversation of this sort:

"Poor old So-and-so!"

"They cut off his leg yesterday!"

"And Luynes!"

"The duke?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, killed on the 2nd of December, fighting the enemy!"

"Oh, I didn't know. . . "

"Really?"

"Well, locked up in Paris, you see, we heard nothing about it."

And this city of Bordeaux, which I have just crossed on foot (there is not a cab in the streets), to go from the station to the room hired for me, at a fancy price, by an old friend of my family, resembles a genuine Cour des Miracles:* arms in slings . . . wooden legs . . . faces strapped up . . . uniforms of all colours, dirty great-coats and waving plumes! . . . I crossed it, I too in mad spirits, hastening feverishly to the lodging where my young wife, on hearing of my election as a deputy, had come to meet me.

The next day, at one o'clock, I was at the doors of the Grand Théâtre. I saw neither the splendour nor the elegance of the building, although it is one of the finest of those designed and built by Louis, the famous architect. I was struck by one thing only: it was guarded by

* A quarter in mediæval Paris, near the church of Notre Dame des Victoires, which served as a retreat for beggars, vagabonds and sham cripples.—*Translator's Note.*

a battalion of marines. Why? It seems that the people who assumed the responsibility of protecting us had confidence neither in the troops of the line nor in the *moblots*. To ensure our safety, they wanted old troops, accustomed to yield the strictest obedience. Those sea-faring men would feel less tempted than others to fling us into the water.

As soon as I had entered the house, I realized that those fears were not so very vain. Threats were shouted from every side. Ranters had seized upon the galleries; they were speechifying and holding forth; it was like the corner of the street, the public square, the kerb-stone! And insulting phrases, accompanied by defiant gestures, rang in our ears. Somebody was to be ousted, to be violently removed from power: that somebody was protesting and shouting. After all, it was only natural!

And now, under eyes inflamed with rage, began the procession of all the elements in which France had been pleased to clothe her person. She was there in her entirety, France with all her glories and all her ignominy, with the supporters of the Monarchy of July, from M. Thiers to the sons of Louis-Philippe; with the grey-beards of 1848: Louis Blanc, Jules

Favre, the most world-renowned drivellers of the century; especially with the three henchmen of Napoleon III.: Conti, Gavini, Galloni d'Istria! They had offered themselves as candidates and Corsica had not scrupled to elect them! I heard some of my colleagues mutter:

"Let's give Corsica back to Italy!"

Then there were unknown men, a crowd of them, the belated representatives of a party which does not know much about itself, but in which the people of France had placed their faith for the moment, because they knew it to be honest and decent and incapable of caring more for the cause of its princes than for that of its country. Next came the galaxy of our generals, the illustrious vanquished who, even at that time, did not despair either of their talent or of our vitality: Martin des Pallières, Du Temple, Jaurès, Jauréguiberry, D'Aurelle de Paladines, Chanzy, Billot, all bearers of names that will live in history. And, walking at their head, the most celebrated upsetter of thrones of the day, the Italian Garibaldi, who sought with his bands to make the deluded French believe that he was risking his skin for love of them, whereas his soldiers and he thought of nothing but holding low revel in our cities!

The man Garibaldi is worth portraying, as he appeared in the midst of that assembly of men of whom by far the greater part were polished and well-bred people. He was there, motionless and silent, wearing a plain grey jacket and, on his head, his famous red cap, not unlike a fez, although different in shape, which he did not remove on any pretext whatever. Alone, isolated in that swaying crowd, he offered himself to the admiration of his colleagues, an admiration which they were slow in showing:

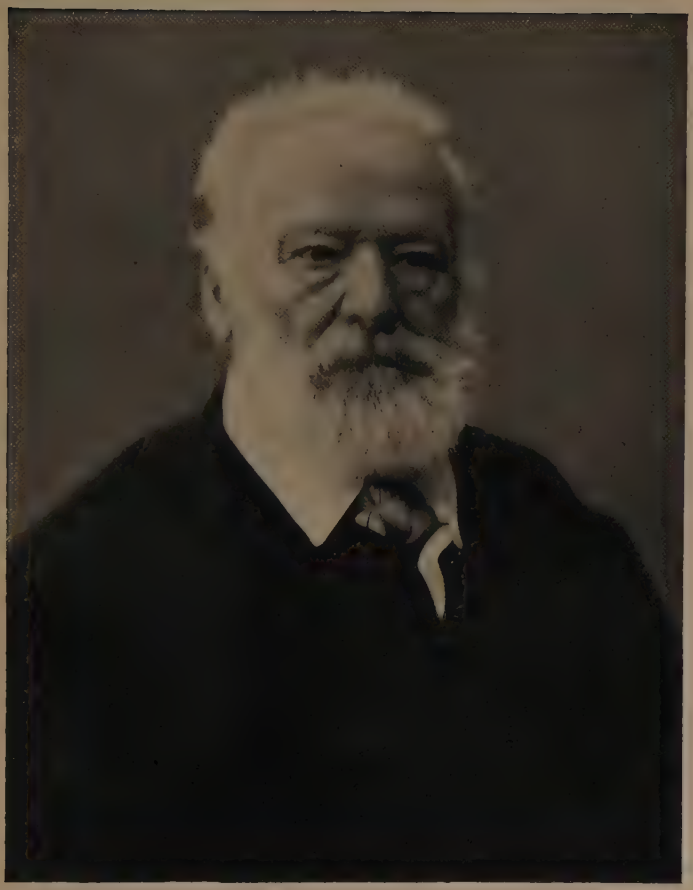
"Take off your cap!" members began to shout from every side.

But he, refusing to hear, walked steadily to the president's chair. He was seen to hand in a sheet of paper on which were scribbled a few lines of writing. It was his resignation. Then, striving to drown the protests muttered on every side against his insolent behaviour:

"You pack of rustics!" he cried.

And he disappeared.

After Garibaldi, Victor Hugo! He, also, had entered the house with his national-guard's képi on his head. Hardly was Garibaldi gone, when Victor Hugo, as though he could not endure that another had occupied the public attention before him, leapt up the steps of



VICTOR HUGO.

the tribune at a single bound and began as follows:

"In this age of conferences and carnage . . . !"

He could get no further: everybody was laughing. We never saw him again, at either Bordeaux or Versailles. He returned to that Olympus which romanticism had built for him in the past; and he did well. He was a demi-god on Parnassus: in a political assembly, he would soon have become ridiculous.

I must also mention Louis Blanc. People pointed him out to one another from every corner of the house: such a great agitator and such a little, little man! It was from his lips that the memorable aphorism fell at that time:

"The Republic is like the sun; the man who cannot see it is blind."

There were other illustrious people there besides: a bishop, the famous Dupanloup; the Duc de Broglie, whose reputation as a statesman had preceded him. Ranc! Naquet! One the apostle of revolt, the other of divorce. And, towering above them all, not through his physical stature, but by reason of the intellectual radiance that emanated from his strange personality, M. Thiers. He was exceedingly ugly, but his smooth face, puffed out with yellow fat and

completely clean-shaven, acted as a frame to a pair of eyes twinkling with humour and keen as gimlets. In less than two days, we had hustled him into office as chief of the executive power, as peace negotiator, as commander-in-chief of our armies, in a word, as uncontested adviser of what we were to think and believe. It was relying on this confidence—the inevitable result of the fact that he had been elected the representative of a number of different constituencies—that he invented that wonderful machine for creating a vacuum which he called the compact of Bordeaux and which, postponing the proclamation of a definite form of government till Doomsday, became the pendulum thanks to which, for two whole years, he was able to play upon our energies to the greater glory of his own person, but also to the greater detriment of France, which he pretended to love so passionately. In short, he held us in his clutches, velvet clutches, if ever there were, and full of kittenish ways, discouraging nobody, flirting away like any old coquette, now with the extreme left, now with the extreme right, so that each thought that it was hoaxing the other with the occult connivance of the head of the state. He held in the hollow of his hand all the forces which had survived in

our fair land of France. He meant to employ them in our service: that was evident. We shall soon see in what the evidence consisted!

The party, however, that kept all pretenders and all republics at a distance had excluded the Empire from any indulgence. The Empire was definitely doomed to disappear and was clearly made to see it. I cannot but feel the emotion inseparable from great political spectacles when I call up the memory of that dramatic sitting, the second or third after the opening of the National Assembly, at which the deposition of Napoleon III. and his dynasty was proclaimed. The whole house was on its feet, threatening, shaking its fists at a man with a waxen face who protested against this last humiliation inflicted on his master. Our anger was vented upon what we described as impudence. Like the Jews demanding of Pilate that he should deliver Jesus to them, we cried to posterity, at the top of our voices:

"*Crucifige, crucifige eum!*"

I do not know which of the two attitudes has left the more painful impression on my mind: that of Conti, surrounded, almost struck, but meeting these threats with the most magnificent coolness, or that of the seven hundred and fifty

representatives of the French nation raging against a man who, for six months, had been little more than a corpse! He had been very guilty; but we, in our turn, were very cruel.

Another and even more tragic sitting, during this short session at Bordeaux, was that at which we were obliged to set our signature to the peace-preliminaries, lest we should be thought mad. Everybody wept; and, when M. Thiers, who read out the text to us, speaking of France, employed the phrase "the noble wounded," he stopped, choking with emotion, and for some moments nothing was heard but one long sob on all the benches. At that time, all of us, republicans and non-republicans alike, were passionately French!

Ten days later, we reassembled, no longer at Bordeaux, but at Versailles.

2

At Versailles, in the palace of the Great King, still warm from the contact of the German Emperor! And, even before entering it, we were grappling with the most formidable and treacherous of insurrections.

It was a curious spectacle, that of this impro-

vised capital from which we heard the federates' guns thundering incessantly in the distance, while every one did the best he could to secure a lodging at fancy prices. My wife and I, though among the first to arrive, found nothing to let but one room; and this room was a piano-shop. During the first night that we spent there, an infernal noise of singing and dancing kept us from sleeping until break of day. An unfrocked priest, the Abbé Baüer, who had once been chaplain to the Empress Eugénie, was installed above our heads in a handsome flat, where, for over a week, he had been making up for the long incarceration imposed by the siege of Paris, which seemed doubly long to men of ill-will.

But the crowding became particularly strange and noticeable at meal-times: all the *tables d'hôte*, all the private dining-rooms were taken by assault. There were no servants to wait upon you. The kitchens were invaded by our wives and by ourselves. On every hand was shown the resignation of soldiers in the field, who eat when they have time and who eat anything that comes their way. After the first few days, a little method penetrated through this general want of method. The Baron and Baronne de Soubeyran, who had become the tenants of a luxurious dwelling,

opened its doors to their many friends and were able to keep open house until the end of the insurrection. Every evening, we sat down to table there; each told the story of what he had seen or heard during the day. They were sad sights and sad sounds. Always more killed and wounded; and yet, on every side, life and hope. Emmanuel d'Harcourt, Albert de Mun slipped through the outposts and came to infect their elders with their own spirit of youth and vitality.

The insurrection drew to a close. General Thiers, or "the tierce of a general," as the disrespectful called him—and everybody knows that there are always plenty of disrespectful people in France—had crushed it by dint of his energy, by dint of his tenacity of purpose, but also, alas, by dint of pledges of which no one exactly knew the tenor, but of the existence of which there is no doubt, because he himself gave them as his excuse for refusing his assistance to the monarchist schemes. On the evening of the 29th of May, he announced to the Assembly that our troops had passed the fortifications and entered Paris. I at once ran to the secretarial office of the executive power to ask for a permit, which, in my capacity as the depository of one seven-hundred-and-fiftieth part of the national

sovereignty, I obtained without demur. The next day, at four o'clock in the morning, mounted on the one and only horse which the requisitions of the military authorities had left at my disposal, I rode off towards the gate known as the Porte du Point-du-Jour. My escapade was about the maddest prank that a man could have committed; but we had been so much accustomed during the past six months to live face to face with death! I had hardly passed through the walls, when I found myself in the presence of two hundred corpses lying one beside the other, like an outspread pack of cards. Four or five rounds of machine-gun practice had produced this sinister line. I continued my journey, riding over fragments of rifles, shakos, jackets, when suddenly I came upon the women employed as local sweepers fulfilling their daily task of tidying up the streets, without turning a hair, in the midst of these remnants of humanity. In this way, I arrived at Passy, where the headquarters of the French army were fixed. Then, but not till then, did I realize how inexcusable my curiosity was. They were going to get killed for duty's sake, I through sheer dilettantism: it was really too silly. An hour later, I was back at Versailles, without a scratch and once more

half intoxicated with the smell of powder which, despite the horrors that accompany it, is dear to the heart of every well-born man.

On the evening of the same day, a few friends and I went to the terrace at Meudon, from which, we were told, it had been possible to see Paris blazing since that morning. And the fact is that we were hardly there when we saw two enormous tongues of flame that seemed to shoot up from the towers of Notre-Dame, as from the mouths of a volcano, while there were carried towards us, blown by a violent east wind, sheets of paper, three-parts charred by the fire, on the headings of which we read, in big letters, these three words: "Ministry of Finance." So everything was burning, our churches, our palaces; soon our museums! Oh, the blackguards! And for the first time I felt rising within myself that dull feeling of anger, that desire for revenge, which is the peculiar characteristic of civil war and which, drying up the heart, deprives it of all sense of pity.

As we turned to go back along the Versailles road, we met a convoy of prisoners, squalid old men, ragged women carrying their nurslings slung over their shoulders. Chained together between two files of chasseurs d'Afrique, they

walked, goaded on by soldiers thirsting for revenge. One of the female fanatics made a movement as though to escape; the leader of the little escort rushed at her and, with a blow of his sword, cut off her ear. And all this seemed to us a simple matter, so great was our need for compensation and revenge.

A little earlier, there took place a sitting of the National Assembly which remained memorable, but which, threatening and tragic as it seemed at the start, ended, thanks to my intervention, in a tremendous burst of laughter. One fine day, the officials of the house were informed that the mayors of Paris requested the honour of being admitted to the bar of the National Assembly, in order to discuss the grievances of their fellow-citizens. When Grévy, the president, who stood for the middle-class rectitude and routine of the republican party, heard this, he could hardly believe his ears. Did those gentry propose to repeat the parliamentary proceedings of the Convention?

"Put them in one of the galleries," he exclaimed, "and see that they observe the strictest silence!"

The Paris magistrates thereupon appeared, girt with their municipal sashes, and almost

immediately one of them, M. André, I believe, a moderate man, however, moved as though by a spring, rose to his feet and began to hold forth. The shouts of the Assembly soon drowned his words, but he and his colleagues replied with many threatening gestures and persistent and indignant protests to the repeated ringing of the president's bell and to our own invectives. It was three-quarters of a century since so revolutionary a turmoil had been heard in a French assembly. The least blunder and it would have been all up with the calmness which is the master quality of governments.

"Put on your hat! Put on your hat!" was the cry from every side.

But, whether from surprise or fear, M. Grévy did not put on his hat; and the scene threatened to turn into a pugilistic encounter. Seeing this, I seized the president's hat, which, in my capacity as secretary, I had in my keeping, and, by my own authority, almost without his knowing it, rammed it on the back of his head. Applause rang from the four corners of the house, followed by shouts of laughter, congratulations, hand-shakings and any number of assurances, "We thank you, young man!" during which M. Grévy, wonderstruck, but a little confused for all that,

left the chair, with his head covered in spite of himself.

The Paris Commune was at an end. It would have been a strange thing if an assembly as religious as ours had omitted to offer up public thanks to Heaven. That evening, therefore, the Bishop of Versailles having invited it to a solemn benediction in his cathedral, it was resolved to attend the service officially. The whole staff of parliamentary officers were drawn up in array behind the head of the state, escorted by his ministers. But neither he nor they, notwithstanding their voluntarily respectful attitudes, were accustomed to the observances of a creed which they had never practised. This became quite obvious when the beadle, thinking that they were going to fall in behind the canopy protecting the Blessed Sacrament, came up to them and offered each of them a candle. M. Thiers took his, but, instead of walking behind the clergy, sat down opposite his faldstool as seriously as could be, while M. Jules Simon, who—O the irony of human affairs!—was his minister of public worship, explained to his chief, with a smile, what was expected of him by the Catholic ritual, to which, however, M. Simon himself avoided submitting.

All this was profoundly ridiculous. But had we not to give ourselves the illusion of being that which in reality we were not: a government founded on an officially religious basis? Despite its ignorance of the etiquette of worship, we were grateful to the government for not refusing a part which we intended it to play, that of the respectful son of a church to which France was not to cease to belong.

3

With peace signed and the insurgents reduced to cry for mercy, we could at last, in concert with M. Thiers and under his direction, start working for the recuperation of our fair land of France, so hardy and full of life, but so terribly disabled. At first, the domestic arrangement worked well enough. The husband, it is true, was a little old, but he was so much in love and therefore so full of attentions! As to the bride, her great youth was a certain guarantee of her submission to initiatives that belonged of right to the statesman to whom France had given herself of her own free will. But almost immediately there arose between her and him the two obstacles which were for good and all to prevent the National Assembly from achieving the object

which universal suffrage had allotted to it. Those two obstacles were the division of the monarchists into several sections and the concentration of all the republicans in France under the incomparable leadership of Gambetta.

I will mention only one fact in proof of the distrust and hostility that prevailed among royalists at the time. We had ended, some ten friends and myself, by taking up our residence in the same house, where we all had our meals at one table. The Marquise de Juigné, my mother-in-law, sat at the head of it. She was a woman of great sense, but brought up in the horror of Orleanism, to which she attributed all our troubles. Well, this is what happened one day: the Prince de Joinville and the Duc d'Aumale, both sons of King Louis-Philippe and both elected deputies, had decided, in spite of M. Thiers, to come to Versailles and take their seats in the Assembly. Although I had never seen them, I considered it my duty, as a royalist deputy, to pay them a mark of respect:

"I have been," I said, "to write my name in the D'Orléans princes' visitors'-book."

The reply came, literally, like a shot. I had hardly finished speaking when I received a roll of bread full in the face! It did not hurt me;

and, by way of reprisal, I jumped up and kissed my mother-in-law on both cheeks, while she apologized for her hastiness:

"I couldn't help it!" she cried. "People who tried to bring shame upon the Duchesse de Berry . . . A woman! . . . Their own niece!"

On the evening of the same day, I was walking with my uncle, the Marquis de Lateyrie, a grandson of La Fayette, in the bushes of the Park of Versailles and wondering out loud whether France would consent to replace the Comte de Chambord, her lawful king, in possession of all those splendours.

"But, surely," he replied, "she accepted the yoke of the Prussians!"

From these two anecdotes, of which I guarantee the absolute truth, we may, I think, conclude that, though the National Assembly had a monarchical majority, it was not submissively monarchical and was therefore more ready to discuss its rights than to bow purely and simply before a principle.

Gambetta showed his parliamentary skill in grasping the fact that this was its vulnerable spot and in trying to split it into sections rather than to force it to accept theories which would have frightened it and which, instead of recon-

ciling the Assembly to the Republic, would have definitely estranged them.

Gambetta was an incomparable strategist, as clever at capturing adhesion by his easy good-nature as by his eloquence in the tribune. He had taken a liking to me, I hardly know why. One day, I saw him walk up to my bench. He sat down beside me in a very sprightly mood. Then he took a teetotum from his pocket. On two sides was written, in big black letters, the word, "Republic;" on the two others, "Monarchy." And he began to set it spinning. How did he manage it? This much is certain, that the teetotum stopped ten times running at the word, "Republic." And the great man walked away in delight, splitting his sides with laughter. It was a game, if you like, in which all the fun was on one side; but, at least, it scared nobody and foreboded a playful, good-humoured republic, if the occasion should arise.

A few years later, when he was president of the Chamber of Deputies and living in the Palais Bourbon, I went to see him to ask his support for a charity entertainment which some friends of mine wished to give in his apartments. While waiting my turn to be shown in, I found myself in the company of people of such a

strange and suspicious appearance that, when I entered his room, I could not help exclaiming :

" I feel as if I were calling on Ali Baba !"

And he, throwing up his arms to heaven, replied :

" Ah, if there were really only forty of them!"

Meanwhile, M. Thiers was burrowing underground, with the object, not of opening a road for the Republic (he did not care much about that), but of breaking up the monarchist group. He thought, not without reason, that it threatened the dictatorship with which the National Assembly had invested him. Just like Gambetta, he too employed the resources of his wonderful intellect to this purpose. Resuming the custom which he had observed under the Second Empire, he threw open his drawing-rooms every evening ; and we, measuring the greater or lesser probabilities of a restoration of the French monarchy by the greater or lesser graciousness of his remarks, walked out unsuspectingly, generally delighted with our host and with ourselves.

At that time, I had more than one opportunity of observing the fact that M. Thiers, serious though he tried to appear, had retained his taste for ribald and mischievous schoolboy pranks, a

taste to which he often yielded. One evening, when I was dining with him together with the members of the secretarial staff of the National Assembly, Mlle. Nelly Jacquemart, a very fashionable and exceedingly talented painter, who was engaged on his portrait, was also among the guests. The butler announced that dinner was served and we were making for the dining-room, when suddenly I heard a little scream. I turned round and saw the chief of the executive power apparently apologizing profusely for having touched the young artist's waist:

"It wasn't I," he said; "it was that rogue of a Larcy!"

This brought down a prompt and witty retort upon the little despot that Thiers was generally accused of being:

"Ah, monsieur le président, you are not constitutional enough yet to hold your ministers responsible for your acts!"

Another day, it was at dinner again; but this time the dinner was in Paris, at M. le Duc d'Aumale's. The prince, in addition to M. Thiers, had invited Mme. L——, one of the beauties most in vogue in Louis-Philippe's reign, to whose charms the chief of the executive power was supposed not to have been indifferent in the

past. The fact is that, thinking the occasion a suitable one to pass for a Don Juan (for the little scrap of a man had every imaginable ambition, not excluding that), at the moment when the steward was pouring out a wine which he named aloud—"Constantia wine"—we saw M. Thiers raise his glass and also raise his voice, as, plunging a pair of fond eyes into the fair lady's, he said:

"Constancy! Constancy!"

This delighted the guests, with the exception perhaps of the person most interested, who, no doubt, felt that a lover's first quality ought to be discretion.

As I have shown, political gossip was not the only kind that amused our thoughts at Versailles. Gossip concerning the acts and deeds of one and all, especially among those who occupied prominent positions in the state, played its part as well. M. Grévy and M. Batbie, of whom the first was president of the National Assembly and the other one of the most famous jurists in France, learnt this to their cost.

M. Grévy—the austere Grévy, as he was called—did not, for all that, carry his austerity so far as not to use his eyes to see with; and, at each sitting, his eyes saw outlined in one of the

galleries the figure of a pretty woman, always the same woman, with the same smiles and the same graces. He succeeded in obtaining an introduction and soon found himself on visiting terms with the lady; and she, amused at the effect she produced, cast a complacent eye upon the aged parliamentarian who seemed bent on running after her. By an unfortunate accident, however, the inflammable old man encountered a rival in his path; and the rival was none other than M. Batbie, a regular antediluvian elephant, verging upon the sixties. The lady pursued the even tenor of her way between her two swains, gaily describing to her neighbours the attentions of which she was the object. But, one day, the temptation became too strong for her; and she resolved to amuse herself at their expense. She wrote two identically similar letters, worded as follows:

"Meet me to-morrow, at the stroke of four, at the top of the grand staircase in the park.

"LOUISE."

She then handed them to the messenger attached to the presidential tribune and told him to deliver them as directed.

On the next day, of course, our heroine did

not budge from her gallery; but, at the appointed hour, carefully hiding behind the back of a friend, she saw M. Grévy rise with the utmost seriousness and yield the chair to a colleague, while Batbie, the jurist, dressed to the nines and wearing an air of triumph, also left the house in which we were deliberating. And we, who had been deputed to observe the expression of those two men at the moment of meeting, could truly declare that it was sheepish in the extreme.

4

The National Assembly, exasperated by the persistent resistance of M. Thiers to the object which it was constantly pursuing, determined to hurl its leader from power and to try at last to reconstitute the Monarchy. But, in order to achieve this object, it was necessary to find a man who would consent to be the tacit, if not the acknowledged instrument of a restoration. At first, it was a regular steeplechase. Everybody wanted to be that man. But soon the field was narrowed down; and, on the day of the definite contest, there were only three competitors in the race: the Duc d'Aumale, General Changarnier and Marshal de MacMahon.

The Duc d'Aumale would inevitably have received every vote, if unpleasant rumours as to the inviolability of his declared republicanism had not become current. Was it really worth while to exchange a president blind of one eye for a president blind of two? It was an active accomplice that we were looking for and not a "walking gentleman!" And that is how it happened that this amiable and good-looking prince, while still wearing the halo of his African successes, was declared unfit for nomination. When subjected to a series of questions, with the object of ascertaining whether, if he were appointed president of the republic, he would help the National Assembly to suppress it, he had had the impudence to answer no. This simple remark, which I, together with many of my fellow-members, had heard fall from his lips, was enough to cut the wings of his ambition, always supposing that he really had one; for in this matter, as in so many others, there are judges and judges. One who believes himself called to destinies which he describes as lofty is often but a slave to the most insignificant and commonplace tendencies.

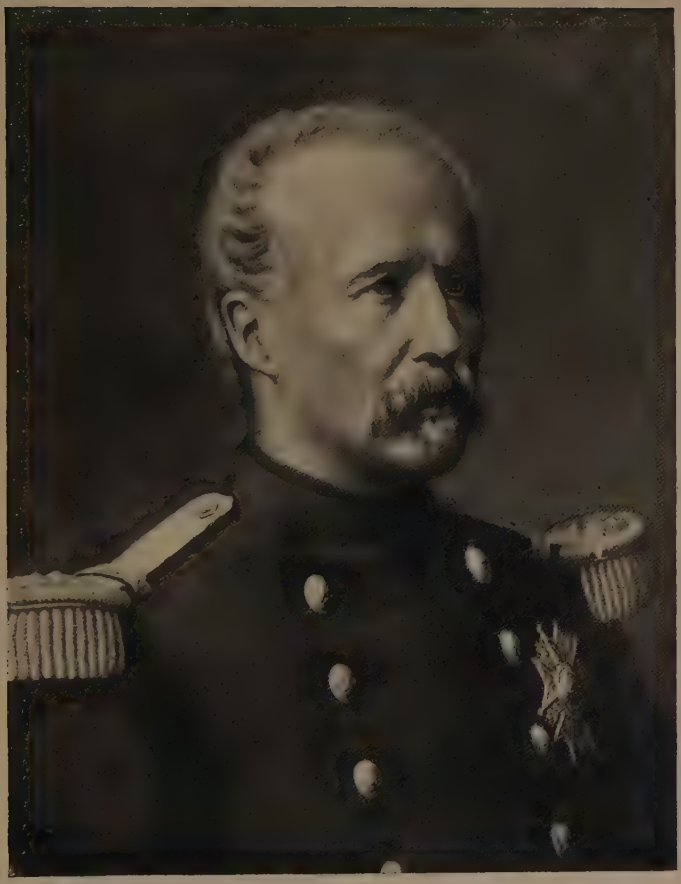
General Changarnier was suspected neither of holding the same compromising views nor of the

same lukewarmness. People were grateful to him for never speaking of the Republic without terming it "the Slut." But the very frankness of the murderous projects which he cherished against the Republic aroused the distrust of the many members of parliament who saw with despair that it was possible for France to be endowed with a government without their having previously discussed its prerogatives inch by inch. If he did not succeed in convincing these members, it was not, at any rate, for want of trying. It was a sight to see him move along the benches on which we sat, whispering into our ears:

"You, my dear fellow, shall be my keeper of the seals; you, my minister of finance!"

For me he reserved the portfolio of the interior! Thus it was that, thanks to Changarnier, I had the honour and delight of intoxicating myself, for at least once in my life, with the cup of human greatness!

When these two great soldiers were ousted, only one remained: MacMahon. He, politically speaking, was a neuter: he knew nothing but his orders and would have died rather than disobey them. As every ambition found a guarantee in his elevation and as every intrigue



MARSHAL MACMAHON, DUC DE MAGENTA.

was certain of having its field of action left free, the doors of power were thrown wide open to him. With Marshal de MacMahon, a clique took office which was very powerful socially and even more powerful in our assembly, where it laid down the law, while very skilfully concealing the fact that it did so. Its leader was the Duc de Broglie.

I do not propose here to judge the work of this clique and still less the methods which it employed to make that work succeed; but I should like to reveal a fact, a simple fact, which, much more than the more or less underhand practices of which certain people accuse it, prove that the check given to the restoration of the Monarchy, in 1873, was merely the result of a piece of blundering.

Less than three months after Marshal de MacMahon's advent to power, the visit of the Comte de Paris to the head of the House of Bourbon, so often promised and so often postponed, took place at last. From that moment, Orleanism was dead and done with. The witty Comtesse de Ségur was in a position to say, when she saw M. Casimir-Perier enter our house by himself:

"Look, here comes my father with his party!"

Parleys were at once opened, not between M. de Broglie and the representatives of our king, but between the delegate of the royalist right, M. Chesnelong, and our king himself. They were stormy, very stormy. M. le Comte de Chambord could not bring himself to agree that the flag of the Monarchy of which he was about to become the head should be made the subject of a bargain. One day, however, he authorized the negotiator to declare, in his name, that he undertook, in concert with the representatives of the nation, to provide the question with a solution consistent with his honour and dignity. In concert with the representatives of the nation! Those eight words safeguarded, at the same time, every right and every form of self-esteem. M. Chesnelong came back triumphant. The Monarchy was made! It was now only a question of clever handling! On the 26th of October, therefore, we met, filled with hope and gladness, at Versailles, in a room demanded for the occasion. The chair was taken, at two o'clock in the day, by the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier. M. Savary and another member, whose name has escaped me, acted as secretaries. M. Chesnelong told us of his anxieties, his fears, his hopes and, lastly, his certainties. We exulted.

Tears fell from every eye. At last, we had realized our glorious dream! This time, the Monarchy was constituted and well constituted! Nothing could now prevent it from coming into being! If necessary, we would die for it!

It was three o'clock. If we wished the good news to be conveyed to the knowledge of the public in the evening-papers, we had not a moment to lose. We flung ourselves into the first train that left for Paris. Accident brought us all into the same compartment: the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier, M. Savary, the Vicomte d'Haussonville and myself, in addition to two young journalists eager for information, M. Gaston Mitchell and M. Ernest Daudet. And, while the two latter employed themselves in taking a pencil copy of the minutes of our meeting, under the direction of M. Savary, who had been instructed hurriedly to draw them up, I began to turn over the pages of the text:

"But," I cried, "do you want to stifle the Monarchy before it has seen the light of the day? Your minutes make M. le Comte de Chambord say things which he never said. He spoke of a solution; he never spoke of compromises."

"But it's the same thing," rejoined M. Savary.

"Oh, you think so, do you?"

And the discussion was eagerly and even violently pursued, without my succeeding in making my companions understand the fresh dangers which the cause which they meant to serve was likely to incur if the susceptibilities of the prince were aroused anew.

We steamed into the station at Paris. The porters opened the carriage-doors and shouted :

" All get out here !"

Not one of those whom chance had gathered around me during that short journey offered me his hand ; all that I heard was a voice that came from the crowd and said :

" Besides, my dear Castellane, it's too late now !"

And that was all.

The next day, at five o'clock, I was in M. le Comte de Paris' study, waiting, as he was and in his company, for the appearance of the *Union* newspaper, the official organ of M. le Comte de Chambord. According to rumours originating no one knew whence, it was to contain declarations of the utmost importance. It arrived at last, brought by the Comte de Rességuier, who gave it to the prince without a word. It informed the French public of the contents of the famous letter which has passed into history by

the name simply of the "Letter of the 27th of October." M. le Comte de Paris read it aloud to the end, without contracting a single muscle of his face. Then he handed it to the Comtesse de Paris, who had been unable to believe her ears when she heard it read. A great silence ensued, a silence undisturbed by a sound, a deathly silence! Something immense had disappeared from the world: the French Monarchy, with fourteen hundred years of glory behind it. . . .

5

Beginning from this memorable evening, Mme. la Comtesse de Raineville's *salon* was at its height. This *salon*, the only one that sprang into being from these events, undertook to a certain extent—leaving the result to chance—to achieve the salvation of monarchical institutions, if not the Monarchy itself.

Its characteristic note, its originality lay in the exclusion of the feminine element. The mistress of the house was the only woman admitted; but she gathered around her so many varied elements that she was able, without fear of imposing isolation or boredom upon her guests, to monopolize the attraction due to the charm of her sex. Every evening witnessed a

parade of old royalists who had not succeeded in understanding that the cause to which they had devoted their lives was positively dead. Side by side with these loyal adherents were others, younger men and consequently less accustomed to make their own wishes subservient to those of their king. One of these, M. l'Abbé d'Hulst, was heard one day to drop this disrespectful remark :

" I pray to God, every morning of my life, to open M. le Comte de Chambord's eyes or else to close them !"

We all bowed reverently before old Changarnier, congratulating him on his latest epigram. Colonel Denfert-Rochereau had shouted to him from the tribune :

"Let me tell you, sir, that my name is Belfort !'

To which, with proud irony, he rejoined :

" *My* humble name is Changarnier !"

We affectionately, but with unspoken sympathy, pressed the hand of the unfortunate Beulé, full of talent as a writer, but as an orator not sufficiently master of himself. Speaking of the National Assembly, he had expressed himself in these words :

" This assembly, born in a day of woe . . . !"

How fatal that day of woe had been to his fame ! It had literally clipped his wings. The

GENERAL CHANGARNIER.

poor man died of vexation : he still believed that it is parliaments that make great men !

And, while this exchange of playful gossip was going on, the merriest and frankest laughter was heard at the end of the rooms where we sat. There was Batbie, the deputy, nicknamed " the Subtle Elephant," who, in his admiring passion for the Comtesse de Raineville, went down on his knees before her and could only manage to get up again with the aid of the helping arm of two of his vigorous fellow-members of parliament. M. Lambert Saint-Croix, a man endowed with infinite wit, thus summed up the ship which we were placing on the stocks under the auspices of our beautiful and charming hostess :

" We shall make a constitution," he said, " which will banish the Empire for good and all, which will not create the Republic and which will preserve all the rights of the Monarchy intact for our dear princes !"

And we all laughed, not without secretly admitting that the notion of a constitution invented by our disabled leaders was and could be nothing but that !

My reason for reconstructing the political atmosphere in which we then lived is that I may better mark the vigour which, in spite of many

disappointments, persisted in rising within us and which, guided by more prudent hands, might have created a republic capable of living, instead of the shapeless thing known as the Constitution of 1875. I can speak of it lightly, having voted against all its clauses without exception.

But I owe the reader the story of a fact which preceded this both ridiculous and ill-omened work and which will show him how little value must often be attached to the words attributed to great men. It was in the course of the discussion aroused by the prolongation of the powers of Marshal de MacMahon, a necessary preliminary to the constitution which was about to follow. I had no reason for refusing my acceptance of an arrangement which, in its essence, was perfectly conservative. And, as I even saw in it a means of delaying the final overthrow of our hopes, I resolved to support it publicly in the tribune. I then perceived that the speech which I had prepared was utterly lacking in relief; and, on the day before, I confessed my distressing discovery to my wife:

"What I want," I said, "is a phrase, a crisp, telling sentence, which will back up my argument."

And the two of us set ourselves to go through the life of the brilliant soldier whose career I had resolved to extol. She remembered that MacMahon had held out in the Malakoff, at the risk of being blown to pieces with it. The next day, I made my speech and concluded it with these words:

"Do to-day for France what MacMahon did, eighteen years ago, for the army. It was at the Malakoff: he was the first to enter the citadel; the citadel was mined and likely to bury him under its ruins; no matter: he rushed to the telegraph and despatched to his chief those words, so sublime in their simplicity, '*J'y suis, j'y reste!*'"*

The effect was indescribable; all hands were stretched in my direction; I was vociferously applauded. For one moment, I knew the intoxication of speech. That evening, the newspapers made it their business to acquaint the world with the henceforth historic phrase which the marshal had never uttered, of which my young wife alone had suggested the form and by the effect of which, therefore, she alone should have benefited!

* Sitting of the National Assembly, 18 November, 1873.

6

The constitution was voted; nothing remained for us but to die the death. This is what we did: not a beautiful death—it was not for one instant beautiful—but a death rendered full of anguish by the vision of the ruins which we were leaving behind us.

Entrusted with the vital energies of the fair land of France, what had we done with our trust? In what condition were we giving it back to those who had placed it on our hands? We had treated it according to the ordinary methods of conservative parties, lackadaisically, waiting upon events instead of forcing them. And already we were beginning to witness the break-up of things. Religion, public education, loyalty to the cause: all were fading, all disappearing in one huge overthrow. On the day on which I bade farewell to those old walls which, for five years, had witnessed the death-terrors of a whole society, I could not help saying to myself that we had been either very guilty or very stupid. I did not think afterwards of fathoming which of the two suppositions was the true one; and I am certainly convinced that I was well-advised.

CHAPTER V

OF A FEW CELEBRITIES WHOM I KNEW WELL

1

TALLEYRAND

ALTHOUGH I did not see the light until six years after Talleyrand's death, I feel entitled to say that I was a contemporary of his old age and that no other penetrated as deeply as I did into the inmost recesses of his soul.

My mother was the favourite niece of that great man; she did not leave his side for a day until she came of age; she cherished a cult for her uncle; she had imbibed his spirit; she reared my childhood in it.

Talleyrand's public life has been written many times; this is not the place to tell the story over again. He took upon himself to do it personally in admirable language, which I have heard disparaged, but never seen imitated. You may say what you please of that career, enlarge upon

its so-called inconsistency, treat Talleyrand as a renegade and a weathercock; but you will never take from his brow the halo which the Congress of Vienna set upon it: Talleyrand creating a Europe of shreds and patches around a solid and united France! The greatness of Germany foreseen and prevented fifty years before it rose upon the horizon! To have destroyed Bismarck's work before it was even conceived denotes a "nous," an intuition far removed above any sort of criticism. The man was one of the great servants of France. Let the Republic show us his like, if it can! For its guidance, I will mention that there is not one of our great modern institutions of which he was not the first to perceive the need: the organizing of education, the transformation of mortmain, the foundation of a national bank; none of these necessary creations escaped his sagacity.

But I intend to speak of the private man, whom I was taught to know particularly well. I shall no doubt astonish a number of people when I say that Talleyrand's distinctive characteristic was sensibility. His personality is generally represented as resembling one of the great judges of the Inquisition, who hold a blazing torch in their hand and send to the stake whoso-

ever stands in the way of their sinister enterprises. This is a gross error. People remind us that he was in power when Bonaparte had the Duc d'Enghien shot. Apart from the fact that Talleyrand always denied his responsibility for this crime, much as he would have wiped away a dirty bloodstain, his gentle nature would never have consented to an act of cruelty for which there was no excuse. Bonaparte was its unaided author; he publicly claimed its conception; and no one is entitled to contest his claim.

None knew better than Talleyrand, in the midst of his buffeted life, how to make friends and how to keep them: nobles and devotees had overlooked his lapses from the dignity attached to his rank, had overlooked the fact of his unfrocking, because of the sure steadfastness of his friendship. The greatest ladies in France remained faithful to him until his death-bed: the Duchesse de Luynes, the Duchesse Mathieu de Montmorency, the Vicomtesse de Noailles; as well as the noblest ladies of foreign birth: the Princesse de Vaudémont, Princess Lieven, Countess Tizchewitch, the Princess of Courland. All his life long, they formed around him a wreath woven of gratitude and affection.

Nor did people of humble station hold him in a

less fervent esteem. I have known any number of servants who formed part of his household: not one of them spoke of him without tears; and this was because he was not only good to them, but affable. He never passed through a hall or waiting-room without taking off his hat to what was then called the livery.

But it was especially upon his family that he lavished an unequalled tenderness. I possess his correspondence with my mother when she was not yet nine years old, in 1829. He is at Aix-la-Chapelle while she is bathing in the sea at Boulogne. On the eve of that revolution which is once again to place him in the forefront, he writes every day to this child whom he loves; and what does he write about? He tells her that she must take care of her mouth and teeth, of her skin. It is not an uncle speaking, but a mother. And he casually introduces some pretty lessons in history:

"I have been to the cathedral again," he tells her, "and the people there reminded me that the Emperor Napoleon visited it in 1805. The grave is in the middle of the church. It has no other inscription besides the name of *Charlemagne*. The persons in front of the Emperor

walked over this flat tombstone. The Emperor cried out to them, in a loud voice, 'Go round,' and he himself did so, in order not to walk upon that great man's grave. This mark of respect made a great impression upon all those present."

In 1831, my mother accompanied M. de Talleyrand to London during the celebrated conferences in which he was able, for the last time, to give a proof of his genius. He liked her to wait for him daily in his carriage at the door of the Foreign Office. Sometimes she would wait for hours. Then he took her for a long drive and relaxed his great mind by giving this little girl of eleven a circumstantial account of the tribulations with which Lord Palmerston, his formidable adversary, had filled it.

Was Talleyrand greedy of gain? Many have said so, but no one has proved it. The domain of Valençay, which constituted the finest part of his fortune, was paid for in part by Napoleon I., who had forced the purchase upon him by insisting that the great dignitaries of his crown should all have princely residences. Did the kings whose thrones he saved show their gratitude in the manner which custom has at all times accepted as permissible? It is possible; in any case, the

Emperor his master never blamed him for it; and no present which he received was ever given as the price of weakness or treachery. The King of Saxony, whose crown he succeeded in keeping intact by his cleverness at the Congress of Vienna, loaded him with gifts. What Frenchman would dare to reproach Talleyrand with snatching Saxony, at that time, from the voracious jaws of Germany?

Talleyrand was once a bishop. It is the habit to represent him as a professional unbeliever. I should be more inclined to look upon him as a casual unbeliever. The fact is certain that he shared the general ungodliness in an age when those in the highest places scouted all the ancestral beliefs; but years came and, with years, reflection. In 1804, the year in which he obtained from Rome a release from his sacerdotal vows, Talleyrand ceased to scoff at God. In 1828, ten years before his death, he had a chaplain, the Abbé Girolet, an eminently respectable priest. At Valençay, at Rochecotte, he had mass said every Sunday and assisted at it. The letter of retractation which he addressed to Gregory XVI. and handed to Mgr. de Quélen, Archbishop of Paris, was written in his own hand throughout. He had only to open the

drawer of his writing-desk; it had lain there for eighteen months and more.

Whatever judgment may be pronounced upon this great speculator in European affairs, there are two haloes that can never be taken from him: the halo of patriotism and that of kindness. He preferred to be a good Frenchman rather than a good imperialist: the imperialists are shocked at this and they have every right to be; but for France to reproach him with it would be both ungrateful and stupid. He chose to keep his heart for his family and his friends: I have never heard Mazarin reproached for excluding from his policy the sentiment which he lavished upon his nieces.

The manufacturers of history go about telling us that the ex-Bishop of Autun never made an absolute submission to the Holy See. According to them, the Pope returned the letter which Talleyrand addressed to him, in order that he might modify its tenor; and it was only thanks to his death, which occurred while the said letter was on its way from Rome to Paris, that this fresh scandal was avoided. To this essentially fanciful story let me oppose the following, which my mother told me repeatedly. When travelling in Italy, two years after her uncle's decease,

she obtained an audience of Gregory XVI. The pontiff received her with particular kindness. By his side, on his writing-table, lay two letters, which he handed to her. One was from M. de Talleyrand, written at the time when he was simply Bishop of Autun. It asked for the beatification of the Blessed Marguerite Marie Alacoque, since included by the Church among the number of those whom she calls saints. The other was his letter of retractation. When my mother, after reading them, gave them both back to the Pope:

"*This* letter," he said, "was *the greatest consolation of my pontificate.* As for the other, it proves that *acts of faith never pass unnoticed in Paradise.*"

A pope does not speak like that when he considers as insufficient the submission of a man filling so large a place in the public view as Talleyrand, especially when that man is a priest!

History has not spoken its last word on Talleyrand: a century hence, it will judge him more fairly. . . .

2

THE DUC DE BROGLIE

I find it very difficult to speak of this man, who was at one and the same time a great scholar and an uncertain politician; who had no general views or, if he had, kept them carefully concealed; but into whose brain had filtered a little and even a good deal of the genius of his illustrious ancestress, Mme. de Staël.

And still I have something to say of him which has not yet, as far as I am aware, been said and which proves once more that the future of a dynasty or of a country depends, nine times out of ten, upon a purely material accident. It is enough not to have foreseen the accident for any man possessed of the most sincere good-will to be struck with impotence. A two-inch screw-nut snaps and the locomotive engine breaks down, incapable of advancing another foot's length.

On the 5th of August, 1873, the two branches of the Bourbon family were fused into one. The Comte de Paris had given way to the head of his family. The road which was to lead France to the Monarchy stood wide open; it

seemed as though we had only to enter upon it and allow ourselves to be driven by the wind. This is what the Duc de Broglie, then prime minister, did, in the name of the National Assembly, or rather what the National Assembly had not the slightest doubt that he would do. It had risen for the summer recess and had left a committee behind it, called the permanent committee, of which I was a member and whose instructions were to control his acts. Meeting on the plea of urgency, our first business was to summon the head of the cabinet before us; and he came. He wore a serious expression of face. It had not that joyous look which marks the conqueror. Was he not conquering then? Whence came that seriousness? We could not understand in the least. At last, driven into the last ditch by the same question that came from all our lips, "What did he mean to do?" he could find no other answer but, "Wait!"

What was he waiting for?

"Events have taken us unawares," he replied. "We are engaged in putting the new military law in force. Not a single regiment is in its garrison; they are all on the highroads. We cannot expose France to the inevitable excitement of a change in the form of government,

without at the same time supplying her with the means of ensuring material order."

And we waited . . . for the excellent reason that there was nothing else to do. . . .

And, during the two months spent in waiting, there were hatching around the Duc de Broglie all the intrigues that were to end in the final miscarriage of the National Monarchy. One hour of inertia had triumphed over twelve centuries of glory! Certainly, the Duc de Broglie took part in none of these plots; nothing could be more unfair than to accuse him of doing so. But what shall we say of a statesman who, after having in his hands all the elements necessary to bring an enterprise to a successful issue, assisted impassively at their formation, waiting for Providence to vouchsafe to impart to them the direction which It wished them to take? Himself chaste by nature, the Duc de Broglie did not know that a woman who gives herself is, nevertheless, anxious to retain the illusion that she has been taken, at least to a small extent, by force. He preferred the part of a supernumerary to that of a creator; instead of a beginning, he was an end; and he forgot just one thing, which was, that the living are not fond of frequenting graveyards.

Having neglected to make the Monarchy for the National Assembly, the Duc de Broglie decided to make the Constitution of 1875 for his friends and himself. The political road was swept clear of the monarchical idea, which was gone for ever; he was able, without committing a crime, to set out in pursuit of the idle fancy which consisted in bringing up on bread and butter a child born crippled, without arms or legs, which has since become what we see it to-day, a masterpiece of deformity! Here again the Duc de Broglie was a victim of his own indecision; his unfitness for creative work was becoming emphasized. He was neither a royalist nor a republican! What was he then? He would have been greatly puzzled to know what to answer. Had he not always, in any and every case, remained a decent man and a loyal man? Certainly, it was not to him that the late Marshal de Broglie would have been entitled to make the handsome legacy which he is said to have left to a son who joined the revolutionary movement:

"I bequeath to my well-beloved son a kick in the bottom!"

He had betrayed nobody, not even an idea; he had been a wavering politician, wishing to

make the Republic without making it positively, even as he would have been happy to attempt the restoration of the Monarchy so long as no obstacle arose between it and him.

At a distance of thirty years, the Duc de Broglie appears to me as a man of infinite culture and tried honesty of purpose, but always waiting for the pigeons to fly ready roasted into his mouth, a habit which those agreeable birds but very rarely practise. I had the honour of coming into close and frequent contact with this great nobleman. I perceived at first hand that he was infinitely good and kind, infinitely honest, but also infinitely irresolute. He never went to work with decision, either to bring about the Monarchy or to bring about the Republic. All his life long, in his attempt to reach one of these two solutions, he took the cross-roads instead of boldly following the highway. And the real Republic was constituted without him, even as the real Monarchy would have been constituted without his aid, had it ever been fated to reappear on the political horizon.

3

THE EMPRESS AUGUSTA

The accidents of life made me see a good deal of a sovereign who enjoyed her hour of fame in the century now past: I refer to the Empress Augusta, wife of William I., German Emperor. The sympathy which she affected for the French in 1870, the cares which she lavished upon our captive countrymen gave the Germans matter for thought. They never caused me any surprise.

In 1865, passing through Berlin, on the day after my arrival I heard a loud knocking at my door:

"The Queen," cried a voice, "commands your immediate presence at the palace."

It was exactly eight o'clock in the morning. I put on ceremonial dress and hurried to the royal apartments. The moment I was shown in:

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Queen.

She opened her arms, drew me to her and covered me with kisses. I was eighteen years of age and endowed with a fairly well-shaped person; my first impression was that I was

being ravished; but I soon got rid of this fatuous notion.

"You have been to our friend's funeral," she continued. "I want you to tell me all about it."

And she deluged me with tears.

Who was this dear friend? His name was Bacourt. He had been secretary to M. de Talleyrand, whose wit and whose fine manners he had retained. He subsequently became French minister at Washington. Queen Augusta had known him at Baden-Baden; she had been smitten with him, to the pitch of setting evil tongues wagging: those tongues were but too ready to turn a loving friendship into an unacknowledged intimacy. So my petty glory was very soon dispelled; but, when, in the course of the Franco-Prussian war, I heard of the consideration which the Queen was showing to our fellow-countrymen, I said to myself that love is good for something in spite of all. This affection was particularly tenacious and never flagged. And the same Augusta, when she became Empress, always remembered that I had thrown the last shovelful of earth on her friend's coffin.

Staying at Lausanne, a few years later, she

sent for me and asked me to accompany her on French soil, to Évian. While crossing the Lake of Geneva, she questioned me about "dear France," as she said. The name of Gambetta cropping up in conversation, she asked me with curiosity what he was like.

"Externally speaking," I replied, "he is rather like a fat hog in armour."

And, when she had leant over to Princess Wittgenstein, who was with her, and asked her what that unusual description meant, I saw her chuckle as she repeated, with much stifled laughter, a word which I was unable to distinguish. None of her own subjects had ever ventured to profane her ears with such an epithet.

Several years after, different people told me that she often related the story of that crossing on which she heard such an audacious remark made! The Empress Augusta had brought from Weimar, her native land, a simplicity worthy of Gretchen; but Dr. Faustus would have been quite capable of turning her head!

4

LISZT

In a very different circle of society, I knew Liszt intimately, Liszt the piano-king, the piano made man! It was in 1862, in Rome. Liszt, who was church-struck at the time, had just taken minor orders and wore a short cassock and violet stockings. Our Lord, as often happens in such cases, had received the reversion of Liszt's love for Princess Wittgenstein, who had refused to become the musician's wife. Pius IX., when consulted by both parties on the incongruous union, had thought it a good joke to have a finger in this essentially ludicrous mixture of austerity and sensual passion. Those were the days when laughter was still in favour at the Vatican.

Liszt was a madman of genius. Dazzled by his new incarnation, he flung himself bodily into religion. By day, he went from church to church; but, in the evenings, he did not hesitate to send his long fingers wandering over the pianos of the *monsignori*, before a crowd of Roman beauties. His asceticism continued to

be limited by an imperious need of play-acting. He must, at all costs, have an audience.

My mother never lost an opportunity of making converts to the Church. Her drawing-room was frequented by all the higher prelates. She attracted Liszt there. For six months in succession, he came every evening. It was there that I had occasion to observe the prodigious egoism of that man, who believed, in good faith, that he carried the world of art and the world of beauty on his shoulders. And, as a matter of fact, there was something cyclopean about this pianist with the amazingly elongated tentacles, which made him master of two octaves at a time, joined to nerves of iron. When you listened to him, you received the sensation not of a piano, but of an orchestra. He would go and sit down to the instrument uninvited; he sent thrills of poetry through our souls. Then he turned his eyes towards his very select audience and, without moving a muscle, listened to the exclamations:

"Admirable! Divine! Superhuman!"

But, if the conversation strayed away from him, even for a second, he rose without a blush, took his hat, bowed to not a soul and slunk away. It appears that the first condition to

Photo. Pierre Petit.

THE ABBÉ FRANZ LISZT.

fulfil if you would create a masterpiece is that you should have faith in yourself. Certainly, a man cannot produce a personal work without believing in his personality; but, however great he be, however sublime his art may seem, it is better to behold only the product, without looking at the producer: the one usually fascinates you, whereas the other only disappoints you.

Egotistical pride is an insufferable pride. Soon after his clerical frolic, Liszt fell into a sort of semi-decay. I had occasion to see him in Paris in the early days of the Republic. He had come to have a mass performed. It was an unparalleled discordance. The lover of Daniel Stern and of so many others, the idol of musical Europe had sunk beneath the ruins of old age. That mass lacked only a *De Profundis*, for it was in very truth a mass for the dead.

CHAPTER VI

WORLD, HALF-WORLD, GREAT WORLD AND END OF THE WORLD

1

In 1863, when I made my entrance into society, there was a society to enter! There were even two, two minutely walled in, the territory of each of which was as nicely circumscribed as that of a state. *Cocottes* and great ladies formed two worlds apart, rivals sometimes, but always distinct. And, when I speak of the former by the name of *cocottes*, it is because I imagine myself to be writing of the present time, whereas I am describing a forty-five-year-old past. At the period in question, vice was still draped in a certain parade. The women who drove a traffic in their charms adorned themselves with the harmonious name of courtesans; and, if, like those who succeeded them, they belonged to everybody, it was at least to one after the other. To the public they were always the mistresses-in-ordinary to a lord of some sort. These ladies formed a federation; they strove

to create an atmosphere of beauty around them, as in days of yore at Athens. A woman had to be really pretty to be admitted to the sisterhood. We are bound to acknowledge that, at the end of the Second Empire, France contained a gay society of such essential importance that it has remained and will long remain the type of its kind, bequeathing to our grandchildren names as famous as those of Aspasia or Ninon de Lenclos. A posy of courtesans consisting of the Barucci, Hortense Schneider, Jeanne Detourbey, Caroline Assey, Blanche d'Antigny, Marguerite Bélanger, Cora Pearl, "Skittles" and Mme. Musart emitted so great a fragrance of sumptuous immorality that, evaporated though it now be, it will long go to the heads of those who aspire to continue their frail predecessors' careers.

These dealers in the tender passion distinguished themselves not so much by the magnificence of their dress as by the luxury of their carriages. They all at that time drove the famous C-spring barouche, one of which creates a sensation whenever it passes through our streets to-day. They all drove the *demi-daumont*,*

* A posting victoria, with a pair of horses and a postilion, similar in build to the state carriage of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.—*Translator's Note.*

which is entirely unknown to the new generation; and, every afternoon, at the stroke of five, it was really an enchanting spectacle to see these beautiful creatures of Satan showing off their prancing steeds, while they themselves, in the most serious manner, assumed the airs of silent and imperturbable ladies of quality. In those days, it was not the women of the world who tried to imitate the light o' loves, but the light o' loves who tried to imitate the women of the world. When the courtesans paraded their person in public, they took care to clothe it with an appearance of good behaviour that was both hypocritical and seemly. Among them were two or three who were skilled horsewomen. Every day, riding round the lakes in the Bois de Boulogne, they tried to brush against the sovereign, who himself was there daily on horseback; for one and all aspired to become his mistress.

It was mainly in the court world that these damsels practised their talents and their ravages. Prince Napoleon, the Emperor's cousin, he who was disrespectfully nicknamed first Craint-Plomb and then Plomb-Plomb, was the leader-in-chief of their revels; but, owing to the fact that he himself was endowed with no little wit, he

refused to give the stamp of great courtesans to any but witty girls. It may generally be said that the people of that time kept the low-water mark of the upper circles of gallantry at a pretty high level, comparatively speaking, as witness that delicious Jeanne Detourbey, who, after committing the imprudence of ascending Olympus, stayed there, was elected queen by the assembled Muses and, for the space of thirty years, wielded an uncontested power over the wits of the day.

The following charming adventure happened, some years ago, if not to her, at least to one of her like: Prince Napoleon, having gone to Rome to die, had taken one of these amiable creatures with him. In the meanwhile, his wife, Princess Clotilde, hearing that his life was in danger, called at his house. The first question which she put to the hall-porter was:

"How is the prince?"

She received the reply point-blank:

"His lady-friend left him this morning!"

His lady-friend? . . . However, feeling re-assured, the virtuous princess went up to her husband's room. She did not find her dreaded rival there. The latter, perceiving that her attentions had become useless, had left the field

free, so that the lawful wife was able to send for a priest instead! A merry jest! And also implying an intelligent attitude on the part of the lady who, by her prudent initiative, had made it possible! There is no doubt about it, the great courtesans born of the Empire and under the Empire were anything but fools.

So general an effusion of love was bound to have an inevitable influence on the head of the state; and, in fact, it did. Even as Louis XV. had had his Dubarry, so Napoleon III. had his Bélanger. The first was resplendent with youthful freshness, the second merely appetizing. That apart, they had the same vulgarity of origin: both were daughters of the people, work-girls of the Latin Quarter. One will have bequeathed to France the beautiful pink porcelain that bears her name at Sèvres; the other has left her no bequest at all, so true is it that, in the domain of love as in other domains, decadence was there, waiting for us! Be this as it may, Marguerite Bélanger soon assumed a considerable empire over the sovereign: she accompanied him wherever he went for change of air, to Plombières, Vichy and elsewhere. I will leave my readers to picture

the degree of exaltation to which the imperial adventure gave rise in the unsettled imagination of the young persons who aspired to achieve an erotic career. The Bélanger was an emperor's mistress! Why should each of them not be as much in her turn? And they realized with pride that, in the half-world that was theirs, the degrading connections would henceforth be fewer and fewer, seeing that the haunts where men went in search of them could hardly be situated lower than that from which the favourite had sprung!

At the same time, the friends of Napoleon III. began to be alarmed. The Emperor was no longer a young man; in the opinion of the doctors, he was assailed by a disorder which, given the aid of certain exertions, might bring him prematurely to the grave. He must be separated from that hussy at all costs! But these things are more easily said than done. The hussy was on her guard. She was so thoroughly on her guard that no one was ever able to catch her in the act of even the most legitimate flirtation. It was then that the Empress, playing the part of the careful and considerate mother rather than of the outraged wife, conceived the strange notion of making

an attempt to save the Empire by herself going and asking the girl to give her back the Emperor her husband! One fine evening, she burst in upon her. What passed between the two women? Did Eugénie Montijo retain a remnant of the dignity that was hers by nature? Did Marguerite Bélanger find in her vulgar soul a sufficient sense of propriety to deny the evidence to the end? This, no doubt, will never be known: neither of them cared to perpetuate the memory of that squalid incident; but the fact remains that it contributed, more than the circumambient air, more than the reputation for wit and beauty of a good many of those girls and more than their luxury and their freedom from all shame, to raise in the eyes of the crowd that class of women, who, fallen from the height of their fleeting greatness, were soon to pass from the condition of courtesans to that of simple *cocottes*. By trying to cope with them, the Empress of the French had exalted them to unlooked-for heights.

What we see to-day is the offspring of what existed then: the last of the courtesans has disappeared; from being aristocrats they have now become plebeians. I will show them presently as they are; and the reader will see that,

all the same, the ancestress was better than her descendant. She, at least, had style.

2

Face to face with this society, which was not exactly a society at all, stood another, which was very French and yet very different from what was called the court world. Essentially traditional in character, it had remained precisely similar to that which went before it. This, no doubt, is why it was given the name of *Gratin*. *Gratin* means the bottom of the saucepan; and the bottom of the saucepan, in this case, means adherence, tenacious adherence to the metal in which the cooking has been done. And, in my opinion, this epithet was wrongly bestowed upon it, for, in both politics and religion, it was a thousand times more modern than that which has since succeeded it. But it was not Bonapartist in its sympathies; and that was the unpardonable sin. Traditional! It was traditional not only in its sentiments, but also in its domestic habits. Thus, for instance, the young women never went out alone, nor the old ones either, for that matter. A tall footman walked at fifteen paces behind them and

ensured them against accidents of any kind. Hence this consequence, that, if any fond vagary did occur, the "protagonist" had generally to be looked for at home. Never was there a more propitious period, amorously speaking, for the Don Juans of the piano and the drawing-board. I know of more than one young man of quality who came into the world in this way and who believes himself to have illustrious blood in his veins, whereas, when all is said, their contents are not worth speaking of!

The paternal roof was also—and more than all the rest—traditional. Instead of being scattered over the four corners of Paris, as in our day, all the members of one family gathered round the common ancestor. When a marriage or a birth took place, this was not treated as a pretext for deserting the home: the inmates packed themselves a little tighter and that was all! I know no more typical instance of this solidarity of family than that presented, at the time of which I speak, by the Hôtel Gontaut. Situated in the Rue Saint-Dominique, in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, it collected under the same roof and round the same table the grandmother, her two daughters-in-

law, her two sons and her thirty-four grandchildren, who formed a garland around her. And they had a great deal of wit in that house and a great deal of gaiety. For which reason none dreamt of deserting it. They were all members of one and the same clan: they were not in the least embarrassed by the fact and were even proud of it. Emancipation had not yet come into fashion. Daughters-in-law had not yet taken up the habit of cursing their mothers-in-law without reason. You knew that fate had placed you in a family; you felt that you were meant to share both its sorrows and its joys, its misfortunes and its prosperity.

This society had perforce become frivolous, in consequence of the prohibition to take that part in public affairs which belonged to it by right of birth. At the same time, it was not composed exclusively, as people seem to think, of loafers. I will go further and add that it was the guardian of the national common-sense. We had a proof of this when, a few years later, substitutes had to be found for the statesmen then in office. The society of which I speak at once came to the assistance of disabled France in the persons of the Broglies, the Goulards, the

D'Harcourts, the Gontaut-Birons, the Decazes and so many others who, in the unanimous opinion, administered its patrimony wisely and well.

Also it was never lacking in ready wit. French wit was racy of the soil and did not need a special form of cultivation in order to grow and prosper. It had only to follow its own impulse. I have remembered two specimens which are one better than the other. The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, one of the greatest ladies in France, on a certain day saw a young girl walk into her drawing-room. Her resemblance to one of her male friends, who happened also to be calling, was glaring. The duchess could not resist the temptation. Bending over to him and suppressing her riotous laughter:

"God forgives," she whispered, "and the world forgets; but the nose remains!"

Another time, it was the Comtesse d'Hautefort, also a very great lady, who, talking at an evening-party to a young wag, saw a jeering remark take shape upon his lips:

"Madame," he said, "I seem to have heard that, in former days, you did not scorn men's entreaties."

"Quite true," she rejoined, rising from her seat. "But it would not apply in the case of an impossible little simpleton like yourself!"

A society of this kind was of necessity limited. It was for this very reason that it was a society. But for its selectness, it would have included everybody, as it does to-day. When I entered it, it consisted of a few hundred members at most and presented the following character: at its head were five *salons*, those of Mme. de Gontaut, of thē Duchesse Pozzo, of the Comtesse Duchâtel, of the Duchesse de Maillé and of the Duchesse de Galliera. No one had the right to say that he was in society until he had been presented there; and this presentation was quite a business, negotiated like a state convention and preceded by an interchange of notes to fix the date on which it should take place. And it was quite an affair too for the young girls and young brides when they went to make their first curtsey. People waited for it, stood on tiptoe to watch it. According to the way in which it was made, the girl or bride was stamped for life as graceful or awkward. And, when, to this evidence, there was added the right of calling one of these hostesses aunt or cousin, then, but not till then, you were definitely

classed in what all the world called the great world.

All these *salons*, however heterogeneous their origin, bore no label outside the worldly conventions that constitute what we call habit. They were anti-Bonapartist and that was all; they simply laid claim to be and in fact were no more than the saviours and preservers of the old ancestral customs. In politics, they practised indifference, living on regrets even more than on hopes. For nothing in the world, on the other hand, would they have admitted any one who was suspected of glorifying Napoleon III. or his ministers.

By way of compensation, they were essentially clerical. They were clerical by tradition even more than by conviction and they made much of their devotion. The Pope was greatly in fashion there. They were pleased with him for condemning things wholesale, for brandishing his sword, for shouting aloud; they wanted a fighting pope and they had one. M. de La Rochefoucauld offered him a battery of guns, entirely equipped at his own expense, while a great Belgian noble, Mgr. de Mérode, pranced about in a violet cassock, at Rome, in front of the pontifical army, which he passed in review.

Never had the papal treasury been so well filled. Pius IX. threatened to become a little Crœsus.

This tangle of human prejudices and celestial views gave birth in these great Paris ladies to that state of pious exaltation upon which the old French nobility had, until that time, always looked askance. Soon it was nothing but masses and benedictions. Our church-bells were tolling the knell of the Empire. In summer, we were sure of meeting one another at La Salette, Lourdes or Paray-le-Monial!* Women of the world were on the high-road to transforming themselves into mothers of the Church!

It was then that Mme. de Gontaut had a strange adventure which, even granting it to be due merely to an effort of the imagination, nevertheless remains characteristic of what public opinion at that time attributed to the flower of French society. This great lady, then, was having the carriage-entrance of her house repainted; and, as was the habit in those days, the painter was to inscribe on the pediment the words, "Hôtel de Gontaut-Biron." But, in-

* Three well-known French pilgrim-resorts. Paray-le-Monial is visited in memory of Marie Alacoque.—*Translator's Note.*

stead, either of his own initiative or, more probably, inspired by some rude wag, he wrote, in big letters, "*Hôtel privilégié*"!* And the general public burst its sides with laughing.

But the society of that time was distinguished above all for its simplicity. It was as though the more the imperial world adopted a noisy and showy luxury the more our society made it a point of honour to isolate itself in an attitude whose severity came very near to dowdiness. It had nothing to say to baths, for instance. It considered them indecent! As for frills and furbelows, it left to the dressmakers of the time of the late Restoration,† to Mme. Roger or Mme. Ode, the task of perpetuating through the ages models for which nobody any longer cared.

It was this contrast—a society in the sulks, deliberately shrinking back into itself in the face of a few beings animated with insuppressible vitality—that gave rise to a set which was to preside over the funeral of the old French great

* This is a pun upon the phrase *Autel privilégié*, inscribed over the high-altar of churches privileged or licensed for the celebration of marriages. The inscription can still be seen in London, over the altar of the French chapel in Little George Street, Baker Street.—*Translator's Note.*

† 1814-1830.—*Translator's Note.*

world and of which those whom we call the *cocodettes* were the most famous manifestation.

The *cocodettes!* O fascinating name, which, for many a long day yet, will summon up twenty years at least of mundane intoxication, swayed by no other idea than pleasure! Deriving no style nor smartness from the society to which they properly belonged, either by right of birth or marriage, they relied upon themselves for their notoriety. Emancipated from the tutelage of which their predecessors had been the object, they formed themselves into a new group. Then and there, they broke with tradition. And this happened because it was inevitably bound to happen.

The most famous of their number were three women whose names will survive as the symbol of elegance in the last century: the Comtesse Edmond de Pourtalès, the Princesse de Sagan and the Marquise de Galliffet. As one of them said, one day, speaking of herself and her friends:

"We are the great field-marshals of the army of pleasure!"

To be a soldier in this new army, you did not need to possess transcendental wit, nor a "free" conversational tone, nor Grecian beauty; but

you must, above everything, love amusement! The great thing was to wipe out at all costs the bitter memories left by the war of 1870. It was the husband of one of those ladies, the late Duc de Talleyrand et Périgord, better known as the Prince de Sagan,* who was the great stage-manager of the play which, from 1871 to 1900, they performed to such admirable perfection. During their reign, it was nothing but "roses, roses all the way," entertainments decreed by them and arranged by him. What is called society was, at that time, summed up wholly in those three names, in the other ladies who gravitated around them and in their passion for perpetual enjoyment.

And let no one pretend, because there seemed to be no particular request for wit, that therefore there was none: there was wit and of the best, of the kind that spares persons and attacks things. All that was asked of it was that it should bear the stamp of frivolity or trifling. Numbers of pretty jests that fell from the lips of the charming ladies and young dandies admitted to the honour of belonging to society still delight the ears of those who have hoisted themselves to their place in the social

* He died in February, 1910.—*Translator's Note.*

scale. A licensed *cocodès*, one evening, handing an aspiring *cocodette* into her carriage, made as though he would force his way in beside her.

"Monsieur," she exclaimed, "you are behaving with the greatest impropriety."

"I beg your pardon," he replied, "the greatest but one!"

The charming lady was forthwith admitted to the sanctuary. Her friend's witty sally had opened the doors to her.

At another time, a dozen members of the famous set were seated at the same table with two royal highnesses. Suddenly, half seriously, half jestingly, one of the guests, turning to his august neighbour, said:

"Behold in me, Ma'am, the greatest c . . . . . d in France!"

And he made a gesture which left no doubt as to the supremacy which he was claiming.

History relates that the princess thereupon, pointing to her husband, who was gaily supping opposite her, whispered, in reply:

"Oh, monsieur, you flatter yourself!"

And she too was on that day judged worthy to occupy a throne in the Parisian realm of elegance and smartness.

Definitely emancipated from the old pale

within which the best French society had voluntarily kept until their advent, the *cocodettes* now gave free scope to what was the first reason of their existence, an exceptional elegance. They really had a genius for it. They were elegant in their dress, in their furniture, in their table, in all and everything. To their reign we owe the abandonment of that unbecoming and uncomfortable material, plush, in the furnishing of rooms. They did homage to our old French art by the ornamentation which they tried to introduce. And, by a return to straightness of line in their dress, they proved themselves worthy descendants of the Cabarrus and Récamiers.

But everything has to be paid for in this world. A society aiming at the height of smartness could only effect its transformation by dint of money. Hence the ardent greed for filthy lucre and the terrible steeplechase to which it gave rise. The old Faubourg Saint-Germain stood aghast. It fell back upon itself and waited. It is still waiting, impassive, but threatened with decrepitude and even more with the mathematically inevitable impoverishment of its most distinguished families. Some of their members, it is true, preserved the fine

indifference of the men and women of old for what they called their debts. A lady, who had fallen into arrears with her tailor, capped the reply which Talleyrand made to his corn-chandler. The tradesman, insisting upon knowing when he would be paid, was rewarded by hearing these words fall from the famous diplomatist's lips :

" My friend, you are very inquisitive."

The aspiring *cocodette*, when her tailor put the same question, said :

" If you present your bill once more, I swear that you shall never receive another order from me."

But the times had progressed. Those in which frocks and laces were paid with compliments were past, never to return again. Together with excessive elegance there came into being the uncompromising rapacity of the purveyors. There were only two sorts of people face to face : those who were able to pay and those who were not. Forthwith, the sceptre of worldly elegance fell from the hands of marchionesses and duchesses into the less aristocratic hands of dressmakers and tailors. Little by little, it was no longer the real ladies who led the fashion, but the professional dressers, or, rather,

the much-talked-about actresses whom those gentry decked out according to their notions. And, as everything is interdependent in any form of society, from this broken balance between the forces sharing its life there soon issued the annihilation of all those people, of both sexes, who tried to escape their influence. Suddenly, the *cocodettes* found themselves, in their turn, isolated on their peak, a mere memory. For lack of money, the members of the French great world who, for a brief moment, had tried to follow them, had disappeared. All vanished like the thimble-rigger's pea. The *cocodettes*, instead of forming a society, with its conventions, its personal aspect, its customs, its manners, formed no more than a clique, with no outside influence or effect upon matters of the day. They were queens by the grace of money; and money first shook and then destroyed their throne. Deprived of the essential basis indispensable to the life of all groupings of humanity, after sneering at tradition and being unable to endure either its severity or its restraint, the *cocodettes* found that their reign was not only ephemeral, but that it ended in the terrible social jumble which we behold to-day. Unconsciously and unintentionally, for twenty years

these prettiest of God's creatures practised the most sensational somersaults. Maimed and crippled on the road, they pushed forward at all costs towards elegance, like good soldiers marching straight to the cannon's mouth; and elegance passed from their hands into the hands of everybody, or, in other words, of nobody.

3

1900! The exhibition! Cosmopolitanism triumphant! From every corner of the world, a formidable avalanche came swooping down on Paris! From this time forward, one sees everything there: nigger kings, cannibals, everything, except a society. Universal vulgar extravagance in living has invaded the national territory. The venerable matrons, keepers of the old customs, have gone under. Imprisoned in their dungeons, they have resigned themselves to a living burial. A few of them hang out signals of distress; the vast majority of the remainder have not even the strength left to go to battle. As for the young leaders of the social movement who, after emancipating themselves from all control, believed themselves safe

on the mountain-tops to which they had ended by scrambling, they too have melted away into space, gradually, *leggermente*, *dolcemente*, like flower-dust. Of all the ancestral customs of which they were the guardians, nothing remained; and nothing remained either of the adorable trifles which the others had laboured, for thirty years long, to put in their place. One could not even speak, for instance, of a clean slate: there was no slate at all! Adieu to the little that survived of the traditional usages! Adieu to all and everything, even to fashion, for which nobody cares now and to which everybody, nevertheless, submits!

France has since belonged to all the world, except to herself. See what happens nowadays: you walk into a church; a funeral-service is taking place; you notice that there are as many women as men assisting at the ceremony. The ladies talk and chatter: they make a pleasure-party of the occasion! The people of former days, foreseeing that women would not be able to hold their tongues, carefully forbade them to attend funerals and, in so doing, ensured the respect due to the dead. But this typically French precaution did not suit the essentially motley crowds that give the tone to the country

in our days: they abolished it; and that is all about it.

From the church, you go on to an afternoon-tea, to which a pretty woman has especially invited you. Of course, you expect to meet people there who talk. But what a mistake! The men and women who spoke so loud in church that the very walls were scandalized now sit rooted at the card-tables, silent and motionless. Don't put a question to them: it is sheer waste of breath; they would not hear; and if, by chance, it should reach their ears, they would know better than to answer it, out of respect, no doubt, for the sacrosanct spot where bridge holds undivided sway. And thus the jewel conversation, which till then had been our uncontested and unrivalled ornament, is absorbed and wilfully destroyed by people who care only for money! By imposing their new priesthood upon us, the cosmopolitan crew have driven a knife between our shoulders; they have killed our wit. And yet we had plenty of it and of the best!

From the drawing-rooms pass to the theatres: what do you see there? Nudity, nudity; nothing but naked women. It is the high-priests of cosmopolitanism who (for a change) have obtained

for us this lack of modesty which attracts to France the scum of the world's debauchees. By displaying her to all who come to see, showing her in her most exciting, enticing and libidinous aspect, they have turned woman into a manufactory of vice, instead of allowing her to continue what she had always been with us, a fragrant plant whose scent helped you to go through life by numbing the pain which life brings with it.

Fine manners have disappeared by the way, leaving no heir; for every one now does as he pleases and is accountable for his actions to none save himself. Since any form of discipline is odious on principle and *per se*, what is the use of those restraints, however slight, which surround us and oppress us?

And so we are assisting at the most extraordinary and exaggerated social licence that an old nation has ever beheld. Each one wishes to be in another's place: there is no rank left of any sort; no respect is paid even to age. As nobody has any rights, age cannot and must not confer them on anybody. And all the time that is not devoted, in society circles, to bridge is spent in railing at honours rendered or refused

to others than one's self, so much so that no society was ever more puffed up with its own vanity than this prodigious assemblage of people collected from all parts of the world, not one of whom has ever been known to possess an ancestor or even a surety! Everybody lays claim to rank first! To believe yourself entitled to do so, all you have to do is to be rich. But what is not so easily obtained is that patent for good-breeding which all these people, I need hardly say, pride themselves on possessing! How could they possess what cannot be taught, what you have in your blood or not at all? And the spectacle of their ignorance, if it did not remind us of the knell that has sounded over our heads, would be quite delightful. Because they have collected in a town-house, hired *ad hoc*, all the riff-raff of the old world and the scum of the new, they think themselves entitled to speak of their home as though they had one. They say "at home" in speaking of the Hôtel Continental or the Grand Hôtel. And, once they are at home, how will their guests, almost all made of the same clay, with an unknown basis, that distinguishes their own persons, regard one another? Why, as lap-

dogs do, who are delighted to meet without the formality of an introduction! They hardly know one another's names, for that matter; yet, jabbering together, they become intimate friends, uniting in their sudden intimacy all who are gathered in the same room. . . .

4

To sum up, when I carry my thoughts back to the old world, that of my youth, which was a little haughty, but exquisitely well-mannered, and ask myself what remains of it, I am obliged to reply:

"Nothing remains of it, absolutely nothing."

If I turn to that which came after it and which debased every usage and custom in order to turn France into a temple devoted exclusively to the glorification of elegance, to the same question I am needs compelled to give a similar answer:

"All of that is dead, quite dead."

If, lastly, I look around me for something that remains extant, I can see nothing but shallows, in which ugly frogs take their ease, hopping perpetually between the pond and the

flower-garden. Cosmopolitanism has swept over my poor country like a great leveller. We have ceased to mount, we are rushing downhill, endlessly, without a moment's intermission.

Where will this mad career stop?

It will never stop. An avenging God will place His foot on the neck of our princesses; you will enter their drawing-rooms and find yourself at Mrs. Ali Baba's, with the keeper of the Grand Turk's seraglio for a neighbour. That God will alter and amalgamate all those blooms; the orchid will grow side by side with the dandelion; and we shall once more be conducted into the court of beggars, the court of the halt and the lame, the only court that will be left standing in the wide world.

I see the France of the future looking like this: at the top, a calf, the calf of gold, broken down, a driveller and a dotard. Above this malevolent, though slumbering beast, a huge hornets' nest, in which venomous insects have come swooping down from the four corners of humanity and swarm, rabidly despoiling all those whom they cross on their path. Oh,

what a sight that will be! Talleyrand congratulated the people of the eighteenth century on having known the charm of living. *O bel vivere!* All of that is finished, entirely and definitely finished: no new France will ever set eyes on it again!

THE END

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